

## **PUBLIC**

### **THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION B COMMITTEE MET AT HENTY HOUSE, LAUNCESTON ON THURSDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2017**

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#### **BLUEBERRY RUST IN TASMANIA**

**Mr HEINZ SCHWIND AND Mr RONALD SCHWIND**, MOUNTAIN FRUIT, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Dean) - Welcome to the Blueberry Rust Enquiry. This is a public hearing and we would ask if you could take the statutory declaration in front of you.

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Took the Statutory Declaration.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - Took the Statutory Declaration.

**CHAIR** - There are a few things I need to say before we commence taking any evidence. Welcome to this public hearing. Evidence taken in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. You have privilege here in saying whatever you wish to tell the committee but once you leave this room you no longer have parliamentary privilege. In anything you say outside of this enquiry, you stand alone. Have you seen a copy of the information for witnesses? It should have been a document sent out to you.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - Yes. We have read that document.

**CHAIR** - The evidence you produce today is being recorded on *Hansard*. At the end of the day it will be posted where people will have access to it.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - Can I say that most of the evidence I have here today or I have at home, the TFGA already have it.

**MR R SCHWIND** - I have this advice for the government to spread it out -

**CHAIR** - You have made submissions to us and I will give you an opportunity to make a statement to the committee in addition to that submission. We will then have an opportunity to ask you questions in relation to your submission and any statements you make today.

You have seen the terms of reference and that is what the enquiry is about. The evidence today we are taking must fit within those terms of reference and I will be fairly strict with that. If I leave it open to either of you, whether you or your father wish to make the statement.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - First of all, has everybody read the submission?

**CHAIR** - Yes, we have.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - We are getting toward the fourth season since we have had our blueberries eradicated. What has been happening, as of the last week or so, there are now four places with infected blueberry farms around the north of the state under a containment plan. As far as I am concerned, we are all under the one law. We are all under the one legislation, whether

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you are a big grower or a small grower. When the incursion first happened in 2014-15, the only solution they had was eradication. That is all they were pushing; eradication. If you find a little speck on a leaf then they are all gone. That is how they ran that course.

A bit over 12 months later, Costa's had their outbreak about August last year and then either side of it and all that, and three other little growers have had an outbreak. They are under containment. If we are all under the same legislation, shouldn't there be some sort of compensation mechanism in biosecurity themselves, either as an insurance they have that covers for any losses that a grower may incur once they come in and decide to eradicate all your income, which is basically what they are doing. With me, they have removed about 90 per cent of plants I had and I have gone from an income of \$66 000, which I dropped that year to \$43 000. I had a \$23 000 drop. I put that down just by removing 550 blueberry plants. Biosecurity did not do a very good job in the beginning of noting what ages the plants were. A small plant and a six foot plant were the same thing, according to them. Well, not to me. It is an amalgamation of harvesting fruit.

In the year 2012 I was already up to picking just under 1.3 tonnes of fresh blueberry fruit. A majority of that fruit would have been coming off the most mature plants I had, which were 10 to 12 years of age. I only had about 100 of them because a mature plant will put on 10 kilos plus per plant. We had a total of 600 plants and if they had all been left to go to maturity everything would have been hunky dory and we would have expected something down the track of about 5 tonnes. By my calculations, entering the fourth season since eradication, I would have probably picked 2 tonnes this coming year if they were still in the ground. Taking our pickers' labour costs, removing labels and punnets and trays and things, you can probably work on an average of about \$20 per kilo, which is about \$20 000 a tonne, at 2 tonnes that is \$40 000. That is lost on this season coming up alone. If I backtrack it another three seasons, to when they eradicated, I can go back to \$30 000, \$30 000 and \$25 000, something like that.

I have had some correspondence with Jeremy Rockliff. We asked him a bunch of questions, which I related to in here, going back to July 2015. We put a number of questions to him about compensation and he said the quarantine laws of 1997 do not state there is any compensation. Then I had Mark Sayer - it would have been late last year, probably early December - come to visit our place to tell us they have the new draft of the biosecurity laws up now and they are thinking about putting compensation into it. I said, 'I hope it's retrospective because I want to be included in it'. By the way, there is another grower in Ridgley who is also under the same fate as I am, pretty much - Chris May. He said, 'It depends on whether the bill is passed and becomes law'. All that sort of stuff is out of my hands, but -

**CHAIR** - Can I move away from the compensation side of it. Can we look at Biosecurity and the attention you received from that office in relation to the outbreak of blueberry rust in your crop, and how did you see that, the actions of Biosecurity in eradicating your crop?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - I will let father answer that first and I will come back to it.

**CHAIR** - We need to allow time to ask questions and we only have half an hour.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - They went in your nursery to buy four plants. We saw four plants and you saw, which looked very healthy. I picked the healthiest plants in that patch, four, we took them all and planted them where there was still a gap.

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After a little while they came along and asked him, Biosecurity, if they can have a look for blueberry rust. They are allowed to come in. They have three girls, two guys, they been looking for it. They could not find a thing with about 7 or 8 people and they are laying on the ground looking underneath little bushes looking for blueberry rust.

They did not find anything so they rang the boss in Launceston and he came up because he could not understand they do not find anything. These imported plants we bought were supposed to be infected so they had to confirm vitality of the sort. They go back to Launceston. They laid underneath and they were looking for these things. He came up there and he threw his weight around. What he can do, he could eradicate and he can bulldoze the place and just about push everything over and he really went to town on me.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Would you say it was an aggressive approach?

**Mr H SCHWIND** - Aggressive. Nasty. So, I said can we - if you push it anymore I will eradicate it for you. I said, I get the tractor out push the whole lot and you and you will be out the door. Anyway, he got even more stroppy and everybody lying on the ground there looking for the rust, they all stood up and watched the argument up there. The argument was over a little bit and I said, can we spray it or do something? I said, there should be stuff called mangaset you can spray it with that and it should kill it pretty well.

Oh, no, no, no. Again he went off. Anyway, I settled down and I pat him on the shoulder and I said, look you are not a bad bloke at least you are trying to see if you can spray it. He said, I have to ring Hobart so he went out the door and I give him a bottle of wine. I said, here. At least I can reason with you. I did not want to buy him. I just said, at least I can talk to you so I gave before I asked, before I get news about what to spray.

Then he went down by where they were. He stood up the top and they sat down he said, they are back picking and I think it was before they went down on their stomach again there or back, he went with the glove like that.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, can I interrupt you to ask a few questions if you do not mind. I notice in your submission you have referred to the propiconazole spray, including the sticking agent. They were supposed to come back and inspect the block on a following date, which they never did. are you saying that Biosecurity gave undertakings they would be coming back to carry out further inspections and that never happened?

**Mr SCHWIND** - Yes, that is correct. I am not sure if I have that document with me today, but I am pretty sure you can access it from the TFGA or I can supply it by email.

**CHAIR** - Have they been back to your property since then? I take it they have.

**Mr SCHWIND** - Yes they have, over the last couple of seasons.

**CHAIR** - They have come back since then and carried out more inspections?

**Mr SCHWIND** - Yes, and it has always come back neutral, or negative.

**CHAIR** - It has come back neutral?

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**Mr SCHWIND** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Were you given any explanation as to why they did not come back when they said they would?

**Mr SCHWIND** - No. What happened, they rang Hobart Biosecurity to get the idea of which spray to buy, which I am supposed to spray onto the plants. What they came up with was Propiconazole. They said, 'I want you to go and buy the spray today', so I headed straight off to Serv-Ag to get the chemicals. I got a double strength chemical so I would only use half as much. I said, 'I will spray tomorrow morning', so one of the officers came and supervised it. That was all fine. A day later I sprayed again and I sprayed the whole lot with the propiconazole. That is when I added my own sticker agent, which is like a vegetable oil, to stick it to the leaves so the rain does not wash it off. They were happy with that. They put the quarantine tape over the door, and off they went. They jumped into their utes, gone. A week went past and I thought that they would probably be back within the next three to seven days, it is usually a 10-14 day spray before you repeat the spray. Fourteen days go past, nothing. I heard nothing from Biosecurity, not by email, not by phone, nothing.

**CHAIR** - So it is fair to say there is a breakdown between yourselves, the grower, and Biosecurity and the way they do their business?

**Mr SCHWIND** - That is right. They were supposed to get in touch with me because they were giving me the directive, what to do. On one hand they are putting the tape across the entry on all three infected blocks, and they said, 'That is quarantine tape, do not remove it. If we find you have been interfering in there and doing something, you will be prosecuted'. That is what Colin Spry threatened me with. I said, 'Hang on a minute, mate. One minute you are telling me that and the next minute you are giving me a directive to follow the spray label directions. If it is as badly infected as you say it is, I should be spraying it at seven days', but nobody came back to check it. Nothing happened. Three-and-a-half weeks went past and I got a call around Christmas Eve from Tania Jensen, who said, 'Colin wants to come up in a couple of days and is bringing somebody with him to talk to you about your blueberry situation'. I thought, 'Oh well, maybe it is somebody coming up who has a better plant knowledge, a plant pathologist, or the like'. They rocked up and out comes Phil Pyke from the FGT (Fruit Growers Tasmania) and he introduced himself and they handed me an A4 folder and said, 'Bad news for you, I am afraid. Have a look and read that'. I pulled it open and I got four pictures of a black spot on leaves, enlarged and in colour. I have never seen that leaf with that spot in any of my blocks, ever. Not before Biosecurity, not during and not since.

The other thing they gave me was the eradication notice. They said to read it out aloud, so I read it out so my father could hear it, and they were all there too. It said, we are going to eradicate blocks one, two and three, but we are going to leave block four and you continue with your preventative spray program. That was fine. He got upset and I had to bundle him into the car, we had a bit of an explosion and heated argument. I took him to Sheffield Medical Centre where they put him on a heart monitor for a while to settle him down.

**CHAIR** - It is clear that it was very distressing to you. Are you saying, what you have said here in your submission, is that no formal laboratory report was ever given to you to say that there was a blueberry rust outbreak on your property?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Correct.

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**CHAIR** - Are you saying you are not even satisfied you had blueberry rust, or are you satisfied you did?

**Mr H SCHWIND** - I reckon we have been stitched up.

I reckon somebody needed the promotion. I do not want to say the name. He stitched us up because when they found the first spot on that leaf down underneath he came up to the net and I said, can I see it? That is magnifying two-and-a-half times. I said I cannot see it and he said, we have to send it to the laboratory and get it tested.

**CHAIR** - I am sorry to cut you off. Are you saying it should be protocol, it should be a requirement of Biosecurity, if they detect and believe you have blueberry rust on your property, that a laboratory report should be provided to you, the grower, to identify blueberry rust and that your property needs to be treated or whatever it is?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Yes. Correct. That is right. Usually, I get our water tested - I get it done down at the laboratory - and I get a so many parts of a billion of this, that and whatever itemised thing. If you do a soil test you get the exact same thing.

**CHAIR** - I will go to members for questions.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Do you believe you had blueberry rust on your property, or not?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - I have never spotted it before, and they gave me information from the New South Wales DPI. I have information there are other diseases that can mimic blueberry rust. One of them is called Septoria leaf spot, which is the same freckling on the leaf. Another one is called Anthracnose, which will kill the plant. It gets a speckle, but it is not rust. You can get one called oedema, which is too much uptake of water. The cells are breaking down the leaves, creating a brown dead spot but nothing on the leaf. This was supplied to me by Phil Pyke. You are welcome to have a look at the pictures in there. That chapter was written by a plant pathologist Dr Rosalie Daniel, who is a pathologist in NSW, and if she does not know what she is talking about, I don't know who would.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - You are unsure whether you had it?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - I have never seen the orange pustules underneath.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - You do not think you had it.

**Mr R SCHWIND** - I do not think I had it. I think it was and if it had been found it would have been so minor it would have been almost invisible to see.

**CHAIR** - Did you request a formal laboratory report in relation to your allegation of -

**Mr R SCHWIND** - No.

**Mr H SCHWIND** - He had nothing to say.

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**Mr R SCHWIND** - No, look, Biosecurity came in took over. We had, 'don't go into those enclosed blocks', and the -

**Mr H SCHWIND** - I had to go inside and not come out all day. Stay in the lounge room and sit like this and he said that can be done too before they handcuff me and put me in the room.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Ronald, is it fair to take from your evidence that you wanted everyone to be treated equally? If you had blueberry rust, and there is a question mark about that, should the next three properties identified have had their bushes eradicated? Are you saying we need to do more in assessing whether there is blueberry rust?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - I do not think you can eradicate it once it's out in the system. Once the bug is out in the fresh air, it is out there. It is going to reappear here and there, maybe not this year, maybe next year, but I see a discrimination between how we were treated and how they are getting treated now.

They are being - I do not know what persuaded them to go to a containment protocol and we had the eradication protocol. Biosecurity staff are a lot like a bunch of inexperienced cowboys running around. They do not know what they are looking for and they are spending all day in there. After two days I asked them, 'Did you find anything?'. They said, 'Oh, we are not sure. We will come back tomorrow.'. At the end of that day, all day in there again. Second day, 'Did you find anything?', 'Oh, we are not sure.' Then all of a sudden Colin Spry comes out and -

**CHAIR** - I am going to have to cut you off. Are there any pressing questions?

**Mr WILLIE** - I have one. What has happened has happened and there is not a lot we can do about it.

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Cannot reverse it.

**Mr WILLIE** - No. It sounds as if you intend to stay in the industry. What has to change with Biosecurity to ensure if there are incursions of pests in future they are managed more appropriately than the way you -

**Mr R SCHWIND** - You mean at the ground level? Or are you talking -

**Mr WILLIE** - I am talking about the structure within Biosecurity and protocols. How do we improve that management?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - We would like a softer approach. They can go away and do their testing and then they can come back to the people who are in question or affected by the pest or disease and come and consult them first. There was no consultation done with us. I guess you could say we were surprised on Christmas Eve with the ratification notice. Between and the end of spraying and that, there was no consultation with me or anybody in our family about any other further options. We did have another meeting at the other grower's place in Ridgley and we discussed different options of using a rotation of different spray chemicals and that was refused. That was refused by Andrew Bishop, the Plant Health Manager.

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**Mr WILLIE** - On that point though, even if all the information was provided and a laboratory report came back and said you have blueberry rust and the only option was to eradicate, you would still be unhappy because you did not want that to happen?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - If the only option is to eradicate and the sprays are not going to work, then you would have to eradicate, I guess. Eradication should be the last resort, is what I am saying.

**Mr WILLIE** - What I am saying is that you would accept that if there was more information and you were treated -

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Yes.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I noticed in 2016, I wondered who Mark Sayer was. Was he from the local nursery?

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Mark Sayer is Jeremy Rockliff's right-hand man, who handles the Biosecurity area and does all sorts of negotiations.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. There are a lot of issues you have raised with us and we have a lot of issues from your submissions. I thank you both very much for that. We are on a strict time frame. We have a lot of witnesses coming in today. The committee may want to ask you to join us in future.

**Ms RATTRAY** - After we have spoken to Biosecurity -

**CHAIR** - Yes, after we have spoken to other witnesses, we could do that. We could come back and if there is any further information you wanted to pass through, you can put that through to the committee. The committee can consider that. Thank you both for being here today. Thank you for the way you have given your evidence. May the blueberry farming improve and that it become the crop we think it can for Tasmania and the world.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - It is a super food, isn't it?

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thanks for re-living that difficult time.

**Mr R SCHWIND** - Queensland and New South Wales have it and they manage it.

**CHAIR** - Thank you both.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

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**Mr FRANK GILES**, ST MARYS SEAVIEW FARM, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Welcome. This is a public hearing and you are protected by parliamentary privilege while you are in this venue. Once you leave here there is no further protection; you stand alone. A copy of the Information to Witness was provided to you. Have you read that?

**Mr GILES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Anything you present today will be recorded on *Hansard* and will be made available for general public use if they want to do it in future. That will be available. You are welcome to make a statement. We only have half an hour, and I would like to leave some time for questions.

**Mr GILES** - Where do you want me to start?

**CHAIR** - You have the terms of reference, so you are able to speak to any of those terms of reference. You are welcome to provide any evidence or any information you want to bring before the committee, provided it fits within those terms of reference, which you have done pretty well in the short submission you made.

**Mr GILES** - Do you want me to reiterate that?

**CHAIR** - No, we have that. Is there anything you want to add to it?

**Mr GILES** - No, I felt for the previous people hearing their problems, because I was involved in the 2006 fire down the east coast and I was fairly concerned about losing all of my blueberry crop, which I put five years into. It is very distressing going through that and for these people prior to me, it would have been extremely stressful for them.

I grow totally chemical free. I use minerals, bacteria and fungi, soil-beneficial bacteria and fungi, along with fish and seaweed preparations. I am more concerned about the way Biosecurity are going about it. They seem to be going about it the chemical way and there are other ways. I have been growing blueberries for 15 years now and I have not used any chemicals, full stop. What I am saying is a brief overview of 15 years of courses, seminars, research and putting it into practice. Everything comes back, whether you like it and a lot of people would disagree with me, to the soil and soil health.

I farm using nutrition farming techniques formerly known as biological farming, which is sustainable, involves no pesticides, fungicides or herbicides; minerals only and soil-beneficial bacteria and fungi. This involves taking soil and leaf analysis - the soil analysis at the end of year growing season - and applying whichever minerals are deficient. Basically, it is whatever you have sent down the road to Sydney or wherever you are sending your produce. Whenever you grow something you are taking minerals out of the soil and they have to be replaced. That does not seem to be getting out to the community. I know the chemical companies do not want you to know about it because they create diseases and then they find a chemical to so-called 'stop that disease'.



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In a soil analysis they are testing for 17 minerals along with soil PH and everything has to be in the correct ratio. Agricultural lime you can use at four-and-a-half if you need it, four-and-a-half tonnes per hectare. For things like molybdenum you only use a few ounces per hectare. They are all extremely vital and they have got to be in those correct ratios.

If they are out of whack, this is where if you have got too much of one mineral, it can lock up plant availability. If that is the case, this is where the leaf analysis come in. You have to foliar spray whatever is deficient to get it into the plant.

**CHAIR** - What is your position, your relationship with Biosecurity? I raise that because in your submission you have said you don't have too much faith in them.

**Mr GILES** - No. Getting back to that, I spoke to Lloyd Klumph, I cannot remember when, but I passed on my views and he said that we are prepared to listen to anybody. I said I would get some information from a guy that operates in 40 countries around the world advising farming organisations and governments on soil and plant health. When I rang him the second time, he said, we are too busy. We cannot seek that information and at that time Graeme [TBC 9.41.41 a.m.] was about to leave Australia for an overseas trip. He only had a week to make contact. I expected somebody to get back to me to get some more information from me.

**CHAIR** - That hasn't happened?

**Mr GILES** - No, it has not happened, full stop. They were too busy.

**CHAIR** - How often is your crop inspected by Biosecurity?

**Mr GILES** - It has been inspected the last two or three years. I am not sure. Two years?

**CHAIR** - Are they inspected annually? Is that the position?

**Mr GILES** - At this stage they have been. They rang me earlier, but they did not get back to me because my crop was not far enough advanced for them to come in.

**CHAIR** - Is there any set agreement with Biosecurity that they will check your crop annually?

**Mr GILES** - No.

**CHAIR** - There is not? There is no set criteria.

**Mr GILES** - It comes out of the blue.

**CHAIR** - Okay. Have you had any issues with them?

**Mr GILES** - No, they have been pretty good each time they have come on the property.

**CHAIR** - And you have had no issues with blueberry rust or any other problems with your crop?

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**Mr GILES** - No, because of my growing technique.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I have a question. Frank, do you have a view on the situation in play in which there has been eradication in the past but now there is containment?

**Mr GILES** - As I said, soil health. It all comes back to the soil. whether you like it or not. It is bit like the indigenous people. Everything is tied up to the land and that is what it is. If you take out, you have to put back in.

We have been taking out, especially since the end of the Second World War, and we have got a lot of chemicals going on the soil. For example, muriate of potash is extremely high in chlorine. Why do you use chlorine? You put chlorine in your drinking water and in swimming pools to kill bacteria. They are putting it out on their paddock at hundreds of kilograms per hectare in some cases, so you are killing all your beneficial bacteria and fungi in the soil. They are vital to healthy plant growth.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I do not know a lot about blueberry rust, only what I have read through the submissions. Do you believe the eradication approach by Biosecurity was necessary? Do you think the containment approach they have taken now is satisfactory to protect the industry?

**Mr GILES** - I think the original outbreak was discovered at Costa's and they seemed to bend over backwards for them but the little people, they destroy their future income. I am appalled by the whole action.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Had they have put some effort into looking at the soil and what might be causing the blueberry rust or any other pest issue, there might have been a better solution than eradication.

**Mr GILES** - Yes, a better for a solution for everybody because everybody would finish up with better crops.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thanks, I appreciate that.

**CHAIR** - Do you meet regularly with Biosecurity? Do you go to meetings? Do they have discussions about how you should be protecting your crops, what you should be doing?

**Mr GILES** - If they do, I have not heard or been informed of them.

**Ms RATTRAY** - What about amongst your own circle?

**Mr GILES** - We have meetings, but I have been missing out on them lately because of doctor's appointments.

**Ms RATTRAY** - But you have a group where you exchange ideas, information and talk about the best way to -

**Mr GILES** - Yes, when I get the opportunity.

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**CHAIR** - What could be done better between the growers and Biosecurity toward blueberry production in this state? What could be done to control diseases? We have had another outbreak, you would be aware of that. What do you think should happen to get it right?

**Mr GILES** - I do not know. I was growing cherries a number of years ago and we had a pretty good relationship with Biosecurity, quarantine or whatever it was called then. Things have slipped since there has been a reorganisation. Some of the things I am concerned about are either overlooked or neglected as far as pest and diseases coming in to Tasmania, or the likelihood of them coming in to Tasmania.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Do you think the change in structure might be a lack of staff? When you called back to speak to Mr Klumph about the gentleman you said was available with a lot of experience and were told they do not have enough staff, do you think that might be contributing to the reason why a) growers are not being engaged with properly and b) they are not being proactive, in some respects?

**Mr GILES** - It seems as though it is government policy to cut staff in quarantine areas. I might be wrong, but that is the impression I am getting that we have to cut costs. If you are going to have an agricultural industry you cannot afford to cut costs in that industry.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It is your bread and butter is it not?

**Mr GILES** - Yes.

**Mr WILLIE** - I am interested in chemical free and organic. If you are growing chemical free crops, why would you not try to achieve organic status because of the economic and health benefits attached to it?

**Mr GILES** - I think the term organic has been bastardised, if you will excuse the expression, over the years. It is not what we think it is. In America, for example, you only have to have 20 per cent organic in your product to be called organic. The way I grow, I use some man-made fertilisers because a lot of them are only carbon, hydrogen and oxygen put together by man, which are all beneficial. Not oxygen, sorry; nitrogen. The plants draw nitrogen out of the atmosphere if they have the right minerals. For example, molybdenum helps the plants make available the atmospheric nitrogen, and most of the nitrogen comes from the atmosphere of the plants.

**Mr WILLIE** - I think, from reading some of the submissions, the organic growers are concerned about the containment strategy because of the effect that will have on their markets. That is not going to affect you at all, is it?

**Mr GILES** - No, I am pretty unique in my location. I am surrounded by forest and I do not have any blueberry growers close by, I think the nearest one is 30 kilometres away.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It is a pretty good climate there, too.

**Mr GILES** - No rain.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Gray gets all the rain.

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**CHAIR** - I think they are all the questions we had for you. Is there anything further you would like to advise the committee?

**Mr GILES** - Only my growing techniques, I do not know whether you are interested in that. I wanted to touch on a couple of things.

**CHAIR** - Yes, sure.

**Mr GILES** - One of the things I do is use a refractometer, which indicates the plant health. I am measuring the brix level in the plant, which is the sugar level. Over 12 you increase resistance against disease and insects attack. My blueberries are running at between 25 and 30 on the scale because of the way I farm and the foliar applications I have put on. I think 32 is the top of the scale and I know they are basically bulletproof, except for wind. I can sell as many blueberries in Sydney as I can grow.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Has there been any feedback from your market about Tasmania -

**Mr GILES** - No, because I do not make contact. I am about to make contact with the buyer to see what is happening up there. I will not be picking until around the middle of January.

**Ms RATTRAY** - There is a concern this inquiry has raised the information level around blueberry rust, the industry, and about what that might be do to the good name, the brand, of Tasmania and the blueberry industry.

**Mr GILES** - There are a lot of blueberries on the market.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Some of them are quite tasteless, by the way.

**Mr GILES** - Being tasteless gets back to lack of minerals in the plants. It all revolves around soil health, as I said.

**CHAIR** - There are no further questions. Mr Giles, thank you for being here today and the way you have answered our questions. We appreciate it very much. The committee could always ask that you come back, once we have talked to other witnesses et cetera, so we do appreciate it. Have a safe trip back to east coast.

**Ms RATTRAY** - My son-in-law grows blueberries and I am sure he would be really interested in your brix level. His blueberries have a beautiful taste.

**Mr GILES** - Thank you.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

## **PUBLIC**

**Ms RACHEL de WIT AND Mr STEVE CLEMENTS**, AVIEMORE FARM, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - This is a public hearing, it is on record and being recorded. Parliamentary privilege does apply to you here, outside it does not.

If we reach a stage you believe you would like to give evidence to this committee in camera, in confidence, the committee can consider that. You need to say that if you would like to say something you feel should be taken in confidence. Hopefully we do not reach that stage because we like evidence to be given publicly so we can use it in the best way possible to make our final recommendations.

You have made a submission to us, so we will leave it open to either or both of you to speak, but please leave us sufficient time to ask questions. Thank you.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - As of yesterday, we are aware the blueberry rust investigations of property two and property three, with the original blueberry rust incursion, are rust free.

I understand there is one batch of samples yet to come back to be approved but it means that at least one property is free. It comes back to then adding more strength to the statement that Rosalie Daniel came up with; that Tasmania's weather kills rust. She has repeatedly stated to us that in two weeks, 75 per cent of the rust spore is dead and non-viable. After four weeks in Tasmanian conditions, it has gone. As far as we can see, the lack of desire to do anything about it is really what is killing us.

I would like to say that the options I talked about are containment and eradication. Eradication is not at a single point of level. I have great faith and belief, and I have strong feelings toward Chris May who came to the original blueberry rust declaration meeting in December last year to say, even though his plants had been torn out, his health had extremely suffered. No one had ever offered him evidence that he had it and he went through a lot of stress to deal with it. He was an extremely healthy, fit guy beforehand. He now has heart conditions and his oxygen flow rate is down to 30 per cent. He is close to having a stent put in and it really has destroyed him. He came up and said we don't need to destroy the things.

**Ms de WIT**- Or for them to be eradicated -

**Mr CLEMENTS** - or rust to be eradicated. Eradication does not mean to yank them out, sterilise the ground and start from scratch. These two properties who have become rust free have shown that you drop the leaves, like the deciduous ones do, and you can force a leaf drop in evergreens. You do that some time through winter and you have a high probability of eliminating the rust in Tassie. Tassie will do it for you.

That is the big key. Tasmania kills fruit fly because we have the right seasons for it. They do not survive down here. We have had incursions of fruit fly. They are gone because they cannot survive our winters.

**Ms de WIT** - We do believe that Biosecurity have been getting incorrect information. They have been relying on information from New South Wales, where the climates are a hell of a lot different to ours.

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Basically, Lloyd Klumph cannot get his facts straight. Sorry, I am being completely honest here. One minute you will ask him about properties two and three, IP as they refer to it. IP1 being Costa's and then you have got IP2 and 3. They have still not told us where those properties are. If they are getting pickers in, we have to rely on the honesty of pickers to say where they have been before they come on to our properties, which is totally incomprehensible as far as I am concerned.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Do you think there should be an exchange of information?

**Ms de WIT** - Definitely. I have brought this up with the minister. I have not heard a response. I have brought a few things up with the minister and not had a response.

**CHAIR** - At the beginning of your submission, you make it clear that Biosecurity do not know enough about the growers, the number of growers, none of that. What should happen? It is clear they did not know how much production was occurring from the beginning.

**Ms de WIT** - If I can tell you that even up until our current field day we had with Biosecurity to promote our biosecurity levels within our farms, they could not confirm with us whether the two outer farms that had it earlier this year were evergreens or deciduous.

Lloyd Klumph kept saying one minute they are evergreens, and the next minute they are deciduous. Will someone please let us know what they are? This is what we are working with.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - To answer your question, to start with, even the Macquarie [TBC 9.58.50 a.m.] report says they will have only identified 42 to 43, of which they contacted around 19, which they deemed to be the bigger ones for reporting purposes.

Their emails to fruit growers regarding rust only goes out to a list of about 20 to 30 places. We do not have an active body. We did not have an active body until May, when we discovered we could not rely on Biosecurity because they were not making any efforts to communicate with us. We could not rely on our supposed front man, which was Phil Pyke from Fruit Growers Tasmania. He, quite frankly, was stabbing us in the back.

From that meeting, Trish McFarlane kindly offered to be the secretary and to start communicating. So far, I believe the numbers are in the order of 80 plus growers, which you will be able to see in her submission.

The end result is that in 2014 they had a primary opportunity. It happened, they could not find anyone then. They could not find everyone then. They were asking for everyone then. What happened to the contact list they had then and why did they not, having had an incursion, go ahead? As you can tell, this is not our comfort zone. This is not somewhere -

**Ms RATTRAY** - We can tell you are passionate about your industry.

**Ms de WIT** - We have been in it for 20 years. This is our livelihood. We are hoping that we can pass it onto our kids if they want it and we might be able to afford to travel around the world one day. Let us be honest. We are looking at expanding, whether it is worth expanding, it has to be another \$200 000 in netting.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Plants, ground preparation and the rest.

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**Ms de WIT** - Everything, and a hell of a lot of hard work.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - One other step I might come back to, we have now heard of a fourth farm that has been infested. The fourth farm -

**Ms RATTRAY** - As in at Forth, or number four?

**Ms de WIT** - Number four.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - IP4. Forth comes exactly to the point. That infection at Sheffield has jumped across Smart Berries, which has 100 000 evergreen blueberries under tunnels, and it has jumped across IP2 and IP3. It is not windborne. For anyone to say they did not bring it onto themselves or onto their own property in some way, except maybe IP2 and 3, who I believe are within a couple of kilometres at most of Costa's. It is not windborne; you brought it.

**Ms RATTRAY** - So it had to be in the plants or in the soil?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - The pickers or the pruners you brought down from New South Wales, your own people.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, one at a time please. It is a bit hard for Hansard.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - It could be with the pruners and maintenance staff you brought down from your infested farms in New South Wales to your farm down here, and then all of a sudden you had it. You had it on your farm down here, which had no biosecurity protocols in place.

**CHAIR** - Can we keep going with questions, if you don't mind?

**Ms de WIT** - There was one you had previously about Biosecurity and the amount of staff. I believe they have casual staff, like the people that came and inspected my farm on Friday. They had only started that day. They had no idea how to take leaf samples, so they took a leaf sample. I did not get to see that sample, she said it was clear and there was not rust on my property, but how do I know they are not going to turn around and say, 'Oh no, but it wasn't', or get it confused with something else? Shouldn't they be training their staff before they come to your property?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - I agree and this is two people, unfortunately.

**Ms de WIT** - They do not have staff on all year around and the reason I have been told that is happening is because they do not need them. They only need them through the high season when more boats, planes and tourists are coming in. That is the only time they need them, so I have been told by Biosecurity.

**CHAIR** - This is what this enquiry is about. This enquiry is about trying to assist the growers, to assist Biosecurity with its methods and to come up with recommendations. This is good information, so please put forward what you think should happen to get this right.

**Ms de WIT** - What is also happening is the people who originally went into the Costa facility is that they have been moved into different areas now. We have nobody experienced staying in those areas. That is another breakdown. They have a breakdown in management. Schools,

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anybody, as you would know, if there is not a good leader then the whole ship doesn't run well. You need to have a good leader.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - You were saying people come in from the mainland. How long do the spores live on clothing, hats and shoes?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - One wash. Rosalie Daniel says the basic alkalinity in any washing powder kills it.

**Mr ARMSTRONG** - So clothes are okay, but hats you are not normally washing, that is why hats and shoes -

**Ms de WIT** - I have a washing machine there. Simple.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Apart from that, her statement is that when spores hit the ground in an area where they live, last four weeks. After four weeks they are dead and non-viable.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I know one of the blueberry growers that I get other plants from tell me that anyone coming onto their property has to -

**Ms de WIT** - They fill footbaths

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Do you do that?

**Ms de WIT** - Yes.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - It is a normal thing that people cannot go on the property -

**Ms de WIT** - I ask people to wash their clothes. I suggest that because if they are backpackers and things like that. I make sure I do not get any backpackers that have been working in New South Wales. I am sorry about that, but that is my biosecurity.

I have locked gates all year round. Nobody can get into my property without me opening the gate. You have your footbaths. I suggest to them when they come onto the property that if they do not have access to washing machines I have one there for them to use.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Do provide hats for them, rather than use their own hats?

**Ms de WIT** - No, they wash their own hats. If they do not have them we have spare hats.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Our main cut point is - even though we are not going in camera - we do not employ somebody who has picked blueberries before.

**Ms de WIT** - Ever.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Unless we specifically know them or have used them, we do not employ them. Even bees are not coming to our property if they have been to another blueberry farm.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - What, sorry?



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**Ms de WIT** - Bees.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Bees, our pollinators. We make sure that we have an agreement with our bee provider, our apiarist, no bees that he uses -

**Ms de WIT** - No bees that have been within 10 kilometres -

**Mr CLEMENTS** - come to our orchard if they have been anywhere else. That is our biosecurity.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - So, you do your very best.

**Ms de WIT** - We do.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Yes.

**Mr WILLIE** - If you were to suffer an incursion on your property, would you be happy to go down the path you were mentioning where you drop the leaves and sit out a season to do that?

**Ms de WIT** - You have to. It is for Tasmania. This is not only -

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Given that we are aware of deciduous plants, if we had it at the start of the season, yes, we would probably lose a season's worth of fruit from the area infected. If it is toward the end of the season or somewhere prior to winter, we are killing it. It will not reoccur next season so we are happy to go through that. We are happy to force them to drop their leaves, too, if that is what it needs to be.

Some farmers in the south spray their plants to drop their leaves so they can prune early. These are all commercial options that are currently at work today. We are not organic.

**Ms de WIT** - We are not certified organic, but we do not spray.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - I do not have quite as much time as Frank, so we are not organic. He makes some lovely blueberries, mine definitely do not come anywhere near his 30s. Mine are lucky to get 15s, which is a hell of a lot more than the 10 you need in sugars for Woolworth's. We are commercial and we do not spray anything. The main reason we do not go for organic is that I like roundup. There are way too many weeds and there are not that many hours in a day.

**CHAIR** - Where do you sell your crop?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - You will see ours in Woolworth's throughout Tasmania. You will also see ours on the floor in Sydney. They are the two main ones. We also have access to agents in Adelaide and agents in Perth. Based on whoever is going to pay the most, that is where it will go.

**CHAIR** - You make this comment in your submission and I hope you can expand on it, that Biosecurity Tasmania has heavily relied on a single report from Dr Streck[TBC] to inform their decision-making. Are you saying they have isolated his report and they are taking his position as gospel?

**Ms de WIT** - Her position.

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**CHAIR** - Her, sorry. I apologise. Have they taken her position in what they are doing?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - We say the initial report they relied on when they were deciding whether to eradicate or contain at Costa's was from this Dr Streck[TBC]. This is information we have through Karen Brock, who is in the plant breeders' association in Tasmania. In her research against Dr Streck[TBC]; she had never published a paper on fungus, so I have no idea how she knows how it transmits and how it is eradicated. Dr Streck[TBC] apparently had strong associations with Costa's because she was a consultant to them. How Biosecurity could ever see that as an independent report is beyond me.

**Ms de WIT** - Biosecurity did not know where to go with this rust. This is what I feel. I believe they had no idea at all how to handle this other than sending the first response team in and saying you need to put in washing machines, you need to do this, you need to do that because you have no biosecurity measures in place. They were relying on Costa's, I presume, to give them all the information because they have it in New South Wales; so what do you do?

**CHAIR** - At the outbreak we saw in 2014, how long had blueberries been growing in this state?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - They were planted on our property in around 1980. The industry has been evolving since then.

**CHAIR** - What involvement had you had with Biosecurity during those early stages, until the outbreak in 2014?

**Ms de WIT** - Nothing until the outbreak.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - When we purchased our place in 1998, until 2014 when the first outbreak occurred, that was all.

**CHAIR** - You did not have the background contact with Biosecurity?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - No, we did not need it. Blueberries in Tasmania were a pest free, disease free plant. The only things you would apply to them were things that would help them grow.

**CHAIR** - Is it true that perhaps Biosecurity had been overconfident in their position on the protection of blueberry growers? Were the orchards pest free because they were not likely to become infested, and were they too casual in their approach?

**Ms de WIT** - I think they were too casual with all their approaches, with everything. Since they changed management about 10 years ago, things have become, 'Oh, we do not need that any more; we do not worry about our borders anymore'. Every time we brought plant stock into Tasmania, we used to get methyl bromide to kill any bugs or anything that might have been in the soil or on the plants. That no longer happens.

**CHAIR** - Being fair to Biosecurity, has the attitude of Biosecurity with the growers changed since 2014? Where are they now and what are they doing?

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**Ms de WIT** - We just got in a shipment of cherries because we are expanding blueberries so we are moving cherries out of that area. We have brought in a shipment of cherries and I asked the truck driver, 'How was it getting through quarantine this morning?'. He said, 'Oh yes, it was good. I just opened the back and oh, yeah, you have cherries', shut the back and off he went. Nothing was looked at, nothing was checked.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Apart from that, we never had any direct farm/commercial contact with Biosecurity in 2014. The only evidence is anecdotal, about trips in and out of Tasmania, from that point.

Up until 2010, the blueberry industry in Tasmania was emergent. It was slowly starting up. In around 2010, when you have a \$10 million investment from Costa's into their 50 hectare at Sulphur Creek, about then you probably want to start paying attention to an industry spending that sort of money. Yes, it could be said they were caught off guard, but I could not really blame them for not having a direct presence in the blueberry industry.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Steve, I asked Frank about Tasmania's reputation in our markets on the big island. That is a significant market, particularly for smaller growers because they see a good return for their blueberries, because they have got good taste. Do you have some feedback you might share with the committee on what this situation in Tasmania is doing to that market?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - It has come into my head that the Franklin-Gordon exercise put Tasmania on the map as a clean, green location. It was a fight against people who wanted to do the wrong thing and brought to the fore actions that were happening that should not have been happening. Raising blueberry rust, I do not see as causing us any direct negatives. Failing to deal with it properly is going to rip out your clean, green image. It is an incursion of something that is controllable and is eradicable. We can go from having a fight, winning it, not even bothering to fight and throwing in the towel or, if we fight this one and eradicate it, we are going up again. We have a much greater track record of having biosecurity and our clean green image as something at the forefront.

**Ms de WIT** - Not only that, it is also our market access. If we do not do anything to try to eradicate this, then we are not going to have access to Western Australia and South Australia. Currently, we do not have access to Western Australia because we live within 200 kilometres, which is pretty much the whole state, of an infected farm. They can sell to them because they are spraying. Costa's can sell anywhere in the world because they are spraying and because we do not wish to spray, because we do not have the rust, we are unable to get into those markets.

Most of Tasmania this year, unless Western Australia change their biosecurity and South Australia and Victoria change their biosecurity regimes, all of Tasmania's fruit is going to Queensland and New South Wales. We are looking at hundreds of thousands of tonnes going into these markets. If we do something about it or say we are trying, they are going to say, okay, and they will be a little bit more lenient on us. They will see we are trying and will consider property freedom. Property freedom means that your property, this property here, does not have the rust, so they will buy from that property, they will allow that property through our borders. That one does have the rust, so they will not allow that property into our borders. If we can get to that and they can see we are trying to eradicate and trying to control this, whether it be sprays, natural products or proof of the fact your does not have it, then we are on a win-win, aren't we? The whole state can then keep selling.

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Currently, there are four farms, supposedly, with the rust. We know that two that had it last year are rust free because of our climate. Costa's probably won't be rust free because of their evergreens. They did know that evergreens were more susceptible to the rust when they brought them into Tasmania, they were aware of that, which is really quite disappointing.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Why would they have chosen them?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - They claim because they are pollinators.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Okay.

**Ms de WIT** - They are quick growers. A lot of them are planting, such as Dornoff's,[TBC] in pots. They keep them for eight years and then they toss them out and grow a new one. They grow from this to this in six months, whereas it takes ours five years to get to there. That is the difference and that is why they do it.

**CHAIR** - You have covered some of this in your submission but I want to go a little deeper. You have a time frame in your submission. You mention the December meeting -[TBC]

Chris May, a farmer involved with 2014 outbreak presented research papers that showed blueberry rust could be eradicated without killing, destroying infected plants, copies of which were provided to the DPIPWE representatives present.

**Ms de WIT** - They cut him off at the meeting. They shut him up.

**CHAIR** - They cut him off, shut him up?

**Ms de WIT** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - You are saying they were not really interested in hearing -

**Mr CLEMENTS** - It did not appear that way to us.

**CHAIR** - The openness of the meeting was a concern?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - It was something they were not ready to hear.

**CHAIR** - Were not ready to hear, or did not want to hear.

**Ms de WIT** - They did not want to hear. That means Costa's would have had to do something about their plants.

**Ms RATTRAY** - The containment policy was a direction from the secretary of the department, not from Biosecurity.

**Ms de WIT** - I have been told, through Biosecurity staff, that because management was away at the time nobody had the balls to stand up and make a decision. They were asking Costa's what to do. If they put a direction in, Costa's would say, 'oh no, that is too dear, that won't happen'.

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**Mr CLEMENTS** - This is our understanding. After a containment policy was proposed, the method or the protocols for containment were put to Costa's and Costa's said, 'it will cost us too much, we can't do that'.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That is when the secretary -

**Mr CLEMENTS** - No, that is probably after the secretary made the statement that BT says eradicate, the secretary said contain. BT told Costa's this is what you need to do to contain and Costa's says, 'that is too hard, we are not doing that', and doesn't.

**CHAIR** - Where do you believe Fruit Growers Tasmania within in this and with Biosecurity?

**Ms de WIT** - In their pockets.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - They were an alternative to the TFGA. The TFGA is farming and they were supposed to be, and had presented themselves through the person of Phil Pyke, as a berry growers voice, a berry growers ability to get together.

We attempted to have the same voice through the Australian Blueberry Growers Association which is an arm of Costa's. It is simply a political arm of Costa's. They have the majority of the members on the board and it is being driven by them. Greg McCulloch[TBC] was a very close friend with Peter McPherson,[TBC] the blueberry director from Costa's until recently. The TFGA gave us an alternative, we thought, until we found out some of the things that Phil Pyke was doing behind the scenes. We thought, 'what will we do?'. We do not have a voice.

**Ms de WIT** - Costa's were putting money through his department, not directly but through branches of his department, funding a trip to China and things like this. I know and I have spoken to one of the directors and he said, we have been through all of our financials that cannot happen. I said, let us get real here. He said, yes, I know what you mean. It is not direct payment to FGT, but it comes via them and they are sponsoring. The Costa's were sponsoring through -

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Even if that is not something we have the numbers and figures for, we do have the fact that Phil Pyke withheld from the group that there was a second incursion. It might be two or three. The December meeting, he was with Colin Spry, was when we were informed of the Costa's incursion of rust. He presented to us, got us together and gave us either some camera time and some vocal time on the ABC. We thought, it sounds good. Colin from Biosecurity has told us that the property is contained, that the border was secure. Nothing came in, nothing went out. The border was controlled and there was no transmission. We thought in December, this is magic. These people have this under control.

We reach our fruit picking season, which means we barely have time to sleep. We get to the end of that, March, and we have not heard anything. Then through March we hear there are another two infected farms, through secondary people. Not through Biosecurity, not through Phil, who is supposed to be having our back. we hear later on that Phil is talking to Greg McPherson[TBC] and while they are having a phone conference he is texting Greg, saying, bummer the small ones we will just go to Costa's. This is the guy who is supposed to have our back.

**Ms de WIT** - We lost trust in it.

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**CHAIR** - From that, you are saying Biosecurity should be more upfront in providing information they receive to all growers so you are in the loop with what is happening.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - That should have the effect of finding the growers, not throwing away the lists that they have.

**Ms de WIT** - They could even, with that information, come to us and give us a letter or send us an email saying there was another infected farm. They did not tell us where the farm was, yet the media told us the next day.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank goodness for the media.

**CHAIR** - Are you saying there seems to be a breakdown in communications between Biosecurity, the minister's office and that group? You make this statement -[TBC]

BT's last update to blueberry growers was a meeting in December. No further information was forthcoming until Rachel De Wit directly asked Jeremy Rockliff at the May FGT conference whether he knew anything about the new infections to which he stated, no.

Are you saying there is a breakdown in communication and that may be having a detrimental impact on the growers?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Whether it is at BT or with the departmental secretary, before it get to the minister, the minister at least made it apparent, which Rachel approached him to do, and he said, 'sorry, what are you talking about?'

**Ms de WIT** - Phil Pyke tried and stop me from going to speak to the minister. He stood in front of me and tried to -

**CHAIR** - I saw that, yes.

**Ms de WIT** - Yeah, and Trish was there with me.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I would like to have seen that, Rachel.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - I would not stand in front of her.

**Ms de WIT** - Oh no.

*Laughter.*

**Ms de WIT** - I asked him this question, were you aware? Phil had just lied to Trish and he had lied to Karen about these other two properties, of which I knew about for three months. I had been going through the season and presumed, if Karen does not know about these when I saw her in the street and I was talking to her about them then maybe nobody else does either. That is when I spoke up about it, which he solemnly denied. There were a lot of emails going back and forth between Lloyd and him and all sorts. there is a lot of underhand and secret stuff going on behind the scenes. I do not know who is protecting whom, but there is a mess.

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**CHAIR** - I want to touch on a couple of terms of reference. One was the past and present regulator requirements raised in the blueberry industry in Tasmania. You have identified an area that is interesting; plants coming in and going back out because they had rust. Do you wish to explain that further?

**Ms de WIT** - I had a lovely conversation with the gentleman who set up Smart Berries. I said to him, 'Do you have any?' and he said, 'I have nothing. I've left.' - he put in a new manager. That was all good. He said, 'But I've got nothing to hide'. He told us about the plants coming and I could not work out in the *Hansards* why they kept saying they had increased their border security. I wasn't understanding what this meant - and increased their dogs and things like that, which is just general. I then worked it out. He said, 'We had a shipment of blueberries come in and they got to our nursery and the biosecurity came in and inspected them once they got to our nursery and they were found to have had rust'. I said what happened to them? He said, 'They were sent back but they got to our nursery'.

**CHAIR** - So they then picked them up and sent them back?

**Ms de WIT** - Yes. They would have had to have gone past other farms.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - It is probably a little aside, it is to do with the blueberry rust though. Obviously there are small properties near the farm that are not blueberry farms. I have a few blueberry plants. If they had blueberry rust on their properties and they are not a farmer, just a home gardener with a small property nearby, would it spread from birds, as well as bees? It is still blueberry rust.

**Ms de WIT** - It has to have a host to survive. It has to have that leaf.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - We are not fungal experts and I can't tell you that. The information we have is that it is transmittable over hundreds of metres, not kilometres, by wind but anything more than about a kilometre it has to be transmitted by the -

**Ms ARMITAGE** - That is why I was wondering about birds. Someone bringing them on might stay within your property but something like birds -

**Ms de WIT** - We are netted, we don't get birds.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - It would be unlikely.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - I wasn't thinking birds from you, I was thinking birds from maybe the home gardener or the little property.

**Ms de WIT** - But they can't get into my orchard.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - They couldn't actually bring the spore?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - No.

**Ms de WIT** - No, because I'm netted. There is another biosecurity hazard we don't have.

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**Mr CLEMENTS** - We are not about eradication of plants, we are about eradication of the disease. If some method, or someone lied to us and did something, meant we ended up with an infection that was not our fault, we would happily forego a season's worth of income to eradicate the disease.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - It would be so easy for a home farmer to have blueberry rust on their plants. I might have plants and not know what it is.

**Ms de WIT** - You would notice it because you are looking at it.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - As a home farmer, I would not know.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - The way BT tried to track down the first incursion, which came in through nursery plants, through places such as Bunnings and ended up in backyards, BT put in a lot of effort. They did do a lot of good work hunting those down. Once it had been found out it was there, it was possible to restrict it for the short term and have winter kill it, so it was gone in a season.

**CHAIR** - I have two more questions. One was the capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania that managed blueberry rust. You make this comment and it is a good comment -[TBC]

Failure to enforce its own eradication containment protocols leaves Tasmania open to any big company producing any disease they encounter. No enforcement of a protocol is the same as no protocol at all. No penalty cost for a lack of basic biosecurity...

Are you saying someone can breach any of these protocols, yet there is no penalty likely to be imposed on you at all?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - It is not a case of introducing a disease. That can happen accidentally and not be your fault. Once Biosecurity says everything stops at your farm gate and that people moving in and out have to change or wash their clothes, all vehicles have to be washed coming in or out; if they are not doing that and there is no penalty, why would I bother doing it? As far as we are aware, Costa's changed their containment policy for pickers to giving them some washing powder and telling them to take their clothes home.

**Ms de WIT** - Yes, they would not supply the suits because it was too expensive, not shoes or anything.

**CHAIR** - For the ongoing protection of the industry, you are making it clear there need to be penalties involved and they need to be imposed where a deliberate breach of these penalties and when they are not compliant.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Excellent, thank you for that. I raised this issue in Estimates and I want to raise it with you as well. It was the posting on a DPIWE website on 30 May in regard to blueberry rust, that is -[TBC]



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This disease is now considered established in Tasmania. Blueberry rust will be deregulated as a disease exotic to Tasmania in coming months. The industry will be informed of any changed conditions of trade.

Do you want to make further comment on that?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - The question has still not been answered. Who can authorise a post? Who authorised that post? I don't care who authored it. Who authorised it?

**Ms de WIT** - There are three or four people, I have been told by certain people in Biosecurity, who have access to do the post.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Who wrote the words?

**Ms de WIT** - Who authorised for that to happen without consultation with anyone in the industry? They are going on Costa's words for things.

**Mr CLEMENTS** - There is a protocol.

**CHAIR** - Are there any other questions? Is there any further thing we have not covered you think we should know about?

**Mr CLEMENTS** - Yes, something that only came to my attention last night I would like an answer to. The right to information applied for by one of the growers has a point in it from Biosecurity. It says they sent samples off from this 2016 outbreak to match against the 2014 outbreak to see if they were from the same source. There is no follow-up information. The report we got from right to information is basically the Macquarie Franklin report, which I wouldn't put on the bottom of a pigeon cage. What was the result of that? That is something I would like to know.

**CHAIR** - We thank you for your evidence, the way you have answered your questions and the way you have gone through this methodically in your submission. It is well done.

The Committee is looking at ways we might, with the recommendations, improve the process for the production of blueberries.

**Ms de WIT** - One more thing. There was a question I asked the minister, of which we have not had an answer. It was a general one for other growers. The same letter. It was to ask if the sprays are working. We have not been told whether the sprays at Costa's are working.

As far as their containment issues in place, we have never been told the sprays Costa's are using, and what exactly they are using which is, according to Biosecurity, none of anybody else's business. I think it is.

The blueberry industry, all of us growers, need to know. If we get the rust, we need to look at whether we use that particular spray because it is working at Costa's or no, it is not working, so let's try and find another solution. We are all about finding solutions.

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I feel that if they work more with growers then we will be able to help them. We are the ones who grow in Tasmania. We are the ones who know the climate, we know our plants and we are on our hands and knees weeding the things every day.

**CHAIR** - It is fair to say that you are all about protecting the industry.

**Ms DE WIT** - Correct, but not only this industry. We are every industry, because if you start saying you have to deregulate this; what else are we going to deregulate? Let us go to the salmon industry, let us go to the milk, let us go to everything else. It starts somewhere and this fight is not only about blueberries. I feel it needs to be done for the state. It is a state problem.

**CHAIR** - Thank you both for your presentation here today. We appreciate it very much.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

## **PUBLIC**

**Ms KAREN BROCK**, BROCKLANDS NURSERY, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - These proceedings are being recorded and they will be made known on the website in due course. As part of this process you are protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave here, you no longer have any parliamentary protection. The evidence is being recorded. The information for witnesses has been provided to you. We like to take the evidence publicly because it allows us to use it more openly in our findings, recommendations and other things we need to do. If you reach the stage you want to give evidence in confidence, you would need to identify that to myself and the committee. The committee would then make a determination on that, and it is highly likely we would take your evidence in confidence or in camera, and it would be recorded as such.

You have provided us with two submissions. One is identified as confidential and the other is not identified as confidential.

We provide you with the opportunity to make a statement. You might want to expand on your submission and/or there might be some additional information you might want to provide to the committee you feel is important, provided it meets with the terms of reference. We have three-quarters of an hour and members will want time to ask questions. Do you have an opening statement?

**Ms BROCK** - No, I do not. You have the introduction to Brocklands and because we have three-quarters of an hour, let us utilise the time with the questions the committee might have for me.

**CHAIR** - What is your relationship with Biosecurity in this whole thing? How do you see their functioning, their activities in looking at the blueberry rust situation and working with blueberry growers?

**Ms BROCK** - I would call my relationship with Biosecurity a good relationship. I have an excellent relationship, particularly with the troops on what I call the ground floor level. As you move up the chain, I also have good relationships there. In relation to the blueberry rust issue I see the ground troops were not allowed to do their job.

I see there were decisions made at a higher level than the people I deal with. That has had an impact on the eradication program, defoliation program or any attempt to try to manage this, other than let the property continue to be infected.

**CHAIR** - You have gone into the terms of reference in your latter submission. You say, for instance, no economic impact analysis has been completed in case of an incursion.

**Ms BROCK** - That is correct.

**CHAIR** - How important do you see that is? Should it be outlined, identified and should all growers be aware of that?

**Ms BROCK** - It should be identified. I raised this with Bryan Green in 2008-2009 when he was the minister. This is not a new thing. At that stage, we had regulated import requirements.

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These plants are regulated because, should they infect the state, there is significant impact upon the agriculture horticulture sector.

At the time, there was no review, so some of the regulations - for example, tomato seed - had an impact because it was going to affect the tobacco industry. We have not had a tobacco industry in this state since the 1950s -

**CHAIR** - I hope we will never have one.

**Ms BROCK** - and we hope we will never have one. There were also things, like mildew on green beans, and yet eight chemicals were registered for mildew on green beans. Chemical companies pay lots of money to get these registrations. There was mildew happening on green beans and there was a chemical means of controlling it, so why was it not a regulated import requirement?

They then started doing reviews and agreed and Andrew Bishop this needed to be addressed, but the reviews stopped after a certain period of time or slowed down for various reasons. I queried them when they were pushing the Macquarie Franklin report at the August meeting at Mount Pleasant; why hasn't an economic impact study been done for blueberry rust if it is a regulated disease? The response from Andrew was, good question. That was the answer I had. There had been no impact analysis done to ask: should this regulated disease hit the state?; here are the people who it is going to affect; and here are the economics to show where it is going to have a downstream impact. We had people running round, in this instance, tidying up a very big mess and almost creating a report to suit the decision they wanted for the outcome.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. The next point you make is, no environmental impact analysis had been determined in case of an incursion. I would have thought that would have been the basic fundamental requirement?

**Ms BROCK** - I would agree. The biosecurity laws are stemmed down from the FAO, which is governed by the United Nations.

**CHAIR** - What is the FAO?

**Ms BROCK** - The Food and Agricultural Organisation, which is part of the United Nations. It is then overseen by the European Plant Protection Organisation. We are one of the 74 signatories to this.

The whole term is to secure food security for countries, to make sure we do not transfer things around. Part of that is to do analyses, whether they are economic - to see if a pathogen or a pest has an economic impact - or an environmental impact, which is including social and community as well as environmental; as in native flora and fauna. None of these have been done and they are part of the chain of progress that should be happening for any regulated disease.

If they have been done, they are not publicly available. Again there is a transparency issue or non-transparency issue that is involved in this as well. If you go to the USDA site you can see exactly what the submissions are. There is a neat order of following, of how they have put papers together and why they have made decisions. We have none of that. They keep changing their webpage address so something that was there six months ago is not there any more. It makes it

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even harder to track things. Basically, you have a series of areas you need to look at before you have a regulated disease.

**CHAIR** - Karen, there is a question I should have asked you before. How long have Brocklands been involved in blueberry growing and how large is the organisation?

**Ms BROCK** - Brocklands has been involved in blueberries since 2003. We became involved in blueberries as a result of the Sulphur Creek property that is currently infected with the blueberries. As a result, we were then propagating blueberries for Costa's and for other people, and since 2007 we have been doing tissue culture. This year we will top 320 000 blueberries Australia-wide.

**CHAIR** - Plants?

**Ms BROCK** - Plants. There are significant numbers being grown in this state as well as interstate.

**CHAIR** - You are in plant growing, not the fruit?

**Ms BROCK** - I am in the plant growing, not the fruit. We are Morticias, we take the flowers off our plants so there is no fruit.

**CHAIR** - Thank you for that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - In regard to those significant numbers of plants, do you see a very strong future for the industry?

**Ms BROCK** - There is a very strong future for the industry. There were 7600 tonnes produced by this company last year - 3500 tonnes were imported for processing and another 1200 tonnes were imported fresh out of New Zealand. There is significant development, particularly for processing. I know 1500 acres in the Woolgoolga area is going in in the next five years, all for mechanical harvesting. Western Australia is expanding, but Tasmania has really big potential because we are getting a later crop. We are filling that supermarket chain of all-year production or supply of blueberries into the supermarket chain.

**Ms RATTRAY** - So it is January through to-

**Ms BROCK** - January through to March. The newer genetics are getting into April. We put them under tunnels and they are suddenly going into April. Coffs Harbour come in during May, June and July. We are really at the tail end and that is why there is a lot of investment happening in Tasmania. They want to get that later market so there are brand new genetics coming through to cater for that market.

**CHAIR** - It is a good point. Where do you see - if we set things right for blueberry production in the state - where is it likely to sit in the area of exports, for instance, from this state? We have cherries very high up, and apples are still there. Where would you see blueberries fitting into this?

**Ms BROCK** - Being the second largest berry production state in the country, and do not forget that is a figure provided by the ABS and horticulture statistics, which are provided by

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Horticulture Innovation Australia. That is where we were heading with the Asian, China market; as a clean, green product. That brand has slight damage to it at the moment with the chemicals that need to be applied. Should we continue or try to protect against blueberry rust?

**CHAIR** - To Tasmania it is an industry we have to keep right and we have to do whatever we can to ensure -

**Ms BROCK** - It is essential.

**CHAIR** - Essential.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Just a follow on question if I may, Chair. We heard that Queensland and New South Wales, they have blueberry rust and they control it.

**Ms BROCK** - That is not true.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I hope I did not mishear.

**Ms BROCK** - I was there two weeks ago. They are working on controlling it, but they are now pulling all their 20-year-old Sharpblues and Misties out of the ground and having to replace those plants. They have degenerated in their production to the point that they are not viable to keep any more, as a result of rust. They cannot keep on top of it. If you look at the New South Wales production figures in the horticulture stats last year, it is less than it was the year before, by about 4 per cent.

**Ms RATTRAY** - So they are not on top of it, Chair?

**CHAIR** - No.

**Ms BROCK** - It was interesting. We are very passionate about this eradication program and we have 30 per cent organic growers in this state, who deserve to be heard. They are passionate about their program and I thought, let us have a bit of a look at the other states and what the issues are.

I questioned them, can you defoliate your plants? Considering that the Sikh Indian community are the bulk of the growers and they are getting \$98 a tray during that June, July, August period when you need to defoliate; they are not going to do it. That is top price for winter product. Convincing them to take the leaves off their plants when they need sunshine and sugar conversion for their fruit is not going to happen.

The second problem is if they did defoliate their plants, within two weeks they have new leaf shoot. There has not been a sustainable time frame, such as the Tasmanian winter has. There is no time for the spores to totally disappear.

Rosalie Daniel said, five-day sporulate spore viability starts decreasing. By 12 days it is nearly 95 per cent gone. In 21 days it is dead. They do not have a chance to totally eradicate it up there. They are working on it and they are using chemical controls, but all they are doing is suppressing it and it is what they are living with. Their statistics prove that their fruit is decreasing. If you looked at the number of plants that have been planted it is probably even

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greater. I am only going on statistics, as if their plants are still the same number as the previous year, but there have been more plantings in the last five years.

**Mr WILLIE** - They would not be in production yet?

**Ms BROCK** - A production dip?

**Mr WILLIE** - Yes, even if there are more plants going in the ground, does it take a while for them to come on to production?

**Ms BROCK** - No, that is something I was quite scathing about with Macquarie Franklin. They said eight years for production to be full-producing. These plants in tunnels, in substrate growing, are full production in two-and-a-half years. They are in the ground for four years. I disagree that it takes that period of time. They have production quite quickly, particularly with the substrate growing tunnel productions.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It is interesting such weight is put on the Macquarie Franklin report, yet we are hearing it is not as it is in the real world.

**Ms BROCK** - I think I was quite blunt about Macquarie Franklin in my submission.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I thought I put it quite nicely.

**Ms BROCK** - Had the work been done prior to this, we would have had an independent forensic view. This was not a forensic view. There was Phillip Wilk of the ABGA [Australian Blueberry Growers' Association], who has HAL [Horticulture Australia Limited] funded published works that clearly outline: what it cost to set up an orchard per hectare; what those returns are; and how many years it take for those returns. That was published 2014, I think. It is not as if it is something that has suddenly appeared in the last two months.

Macquarie Franklin came up with figures that I am astounded by. It appeared, looking at the figures of the actual numbers of growers, that the table they have used refer to a disease survey that was done in 2008-2009 by Wayne Williams, Michele Buntain, Ziqing Juan and Dean Metcalfe, and I am thinking, this is just ridiculous. This is very old information that happened 10 years ago. It just totally belied belief. We were never provided with that report, as promised. We were distinctly told we would be provided with that report and it is only one of the growers who referred to it under the right to information that we were even able to look at the papers.

I think you will probably hear more about Macquarie Franklin as you go on.

**CHAIR** - You make reference to that in these points.

**Ms BROCK** - I do.

**CHAIR** - When you say here, Karen, that Macquarie Franklin would complete a detailed forensic analysis of blueberry growers of Tasmania, has that not been done?

**Ms BROCK** - No. There are over 80 blueberry growers. Supposedly, they contacted 18 to 19. I say supposedly because, of those 18 to 19, some of those were not available or they were not even contacted in the first place.

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**CHAIR** - Who informed the growers that Macquarie Franklin were going to do this?

**Ms BROCK** - Rae Burrows from Biosecurity Tasmania. She was the head of this program and informed us at the Mount Pleasant meeting.

**CHAIR** - How long again was that?

**Ms BROCK** - In early August 2016. This is just after we were informed there was an issue.

**CHAIR** - So, we are still waiting for that to come through.

If I go to your third point, this has been an issue that has been raised with the committee; the change of attitude toward eradication, as the job was too big alternatives were being explored. Can you go into any more detail there as to how you see that? I do not want to compromise you in any way.

**Ms BROCK** - I will carefully think about this. The original decision was to pull the plants out of the ground. At that meeting in August even Chris May, who was one of the affected parties from the 2014 incident, said, we were informed the product rust was on the plant, not in the plant. That is quite significant. If it in the plant then you would expect the only way to alleviate that problem is to literally dig the thing out. If it is on the plant, and these plants will resprout from the base, they are a basal shooting plant, you can chop them off at the ground and the plants will reshoot. There was general consensus by all the growers and Biosecurity Tasmania, which was Colin Spry at the time, could see there was potential in chopping the plants off and allowing the plants to reshoot.

Please keep in mind only evergreen plants were affected at the time. The deciduous plants had no leaves. There was a six-week period before those other plants on that property would have had leaves that could have been affected by rust. That is why getting them off the ground was an immediate, must-do job. We assumed that was the tack they were going to take, to cut off and remove the pruned sections, bury them, to do whatever they needed to with the material that they considered fit for purpose.

We saw a total change of heart, come December. They said, this job is now being contained. We were informed they had not removed the plants. Anything that had come into leaf was now potentially being affected. Subsequently, in meetings as recent as July this year, the word feasible kept being raised as, 'it was not feasible'. I queried them on what was feasible.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Feasible for who?

**Ms BROCK** - Exactly. I said, 'I am not quite understanding feasible. You were quite happy to wipe out 100 per cent of somebody's income, because it was 1200 plants. Now we are dealing with 5 000 to 10 000 plants, which is 5 to 10 per cent of somebody's income. You are saying that this is not feasible'. I did not understand their use of feasible and they could not explain this to me.

I then asked, is it not feasible because you do not have people on the ground to do the job? Both Lloyd and Andrew said instantly, no, we would get Costa's to chop them off. It wasn't that they did not have resources they could pull upon to remove the plants. That is why I was very



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disturbed when we suddenly have the sheer thought almost in our head, instead of a calculated, planned approach - whether it is one plant or 10 000 plants - we suddenly have this attitude of, oh, this job seems too big. That was the attitude being displayed in all the meetings.

That was concerning. If you have other agricultural diseases that appear too big, they are going to throw their white flag in the air at the first fence.

**CHAIR** - We move to your next point, which you have partly covered already; it was evident that no clear indication Biosecurity Tasmania had any important research as a point of reference.

**Ms BROCK** - That is correct.

**CHAIR** - This committee was told the blueberry industry started back in about the 1980s.

**Ms BROCK** - That is correct.

**CHAIR** - We have had this industry for a long while, but it has grown, so can you expand on that? Should there have been memorandums of understanding and protocols in place for incursions that might occur?

**Ms BROCK** - I would agree with all of that. What is happening at the moment is that they have an emergency response, which is a blanket document they are adhering to in all incursions.

The problem is, and the reason I put this statement in, they did not go and refer to people that had been working with blueberry rust. So Rosalie Daniel presented to them in 2014. She was not re-referred to. They did not even refer to people internationally. I was able to speak with people internationally, who had written papers in Oregon, Michigan, Spain and the Netherlands. Now, I am just a farmer from the back of Wrigley. Why do these people not have the ability, or do they consider themselves above the fact that they know more than these people do? There was no reference point or any expertise to go back to. They took those decisions upon themselves.

**CHAIR** - Has this been raised with them with Biosecurity?

**Ms BROCK** - This has been raised with the minister, with the secretary, as per attachment A with the questions that I raised; why haven't they gone and referred to these people? It was so shoddy that one of the documents we received in July in one of Lloyd's emails referred to the Department of Primary Industry; somebody speaking on behalf of Rosalie Daniel, not Rosalie herself.

Rosalie also shared evidence at the Fruitgrowers Tasmania Conference that had defoliation. One of the growers even asked, would we be removing the spore source if we chop these off at the ground? The answer was a direct, 'yes'. We were told at the Minister's meeting that no, the growers had misunderstood Rosalie. It was a direct question and it was a direct answer. There was no misunderstanding.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Chair, we also heard there was some confusion within Biosecurity Tasmania about whether the plants were deciduous or not. Is that something you -

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Are they different plants, different varieties?

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**Ms BROCK** - They are different cultivars and Biosecurity Tasmania had no idea of evergreen varieties and what their genetic heritage is.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - They are more susceptible?

**Ms BROCK** - They are more susceptible. They come out of the Florida breeding programs. This was the information I received from Chad Finn from Oregon State University; they only have problems with evergreen varieties.

Costa's Dr Gary Wright[TBC] has written a paper with Simon Bodiger[TBC] about problems with the evergreen system and their attraction for rust. If you are going to have evergreen varieties in the state, and you cannot stop that. Deciduous varieties will also behave as evergreen varieties once you have put them under a tunnel structure. We have tunnel structures going up all over this state. There has been no consideration for the fact that we have now a huge growth of protected cropping happening and therefore the nature of diseases, pests and pathogens that affect these crops is changing as well. Total ignorance. Incognisance of what is happening with plant varieties, plant genetics and with growing techniques.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - We have heard the Tasmanian seasons can kill the spores, but in the protected varieties under the tunnelling it is going to take away that benefit.

**Ms BROCK** - It takes away the benefit for spore removal unless you defoliate the plants.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Right.

**Ms BROCK** - You need to have a defoliation program.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I was thinking that being under the tunnel that the season would not be quite the same, that it would have a different environment.

**Ms BROCK** - The seasons that they are putting in are things such as the Michigan breeding program, which is an amazing program. Jim has three plants, the Liberty, Aurora and Draper. Aurora is the particular one. It is one of the last ones that fruit, and you now have varieties coming out of Fall Creek. There are 15 new varieties coming through the chain. They are all March to April, some of them into May, under a tunnel structure in Tasmania. The frost would affect the fruit, so what the tunnels are doing is stopping the frost affecting the fruit at that stage. These varieties have huge potential for that extra late market but you have to have them under tunnel production.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Not being a grower, I am trying to understand. Was it the frost assisting with the removal of the spores? It was not our cold weather and our frosts that were eradicating, it was more the season itself?

**Ms BROCK** - What happens is the rust needs living leaves. Because we have cold temperatures, it raises the ethylene in the plants, the ethylene accumulation then drops the leaves, like most deciduous plants.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Is that why you can manufacture that?

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**Ms BROCK** - Yes, you can manufacture ethylene. I can convince you in a propagation house. I can very easily drop the leaves in two weeks simply by cutting a plant. Once you cut a plant, ethylene is reduced. Every plant does it, some more than others.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Do you need all those leaves destroyed? Sometimes with plants, I know -

**Ms BROCK** - It would be best if you vacuumed them up, and there are orchard cleaners. In the almond industry they have vacuum cleaners that suck all the almonds up off the ground. The same thing could happen with these. It would be preferable if you did suck them up, bag them up and bury them somewhere. However, within 21 days or 12 days, because that leaf is dying; they have lost their efficacy anyway after five days. Even if you left it, it does not infect the soil.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - You are not going to reinfect it with the mulch?

**Ms BROCK** - It is good mulch.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - You have covered off on the next point of the evergreen and deciduous, and you note here that the time frame management was slow. I take it you are talking about Biosecurity's reaction to getting on top of the outbreak. Is that right?

**Ms BROCK** - That is correct and I outlined that earlier. You have this six-week break and they took three months to make a decision.

I go back to the other point. If they had all their plans in place for a blueberry rust incursion hitting this state, they would have had a plan to roll out, not running around having planning meetings asking, what are we going to do about this situation?

**CHAIR** - Karen, I feel we are going to run out of time with your evidence because it is very important. I am going to ask a couple of questions I do not want to miss.

Due to what you and other witnesses have said in other submissions, are you of the view that Biosecurity has the expertise necessary to pursue the blueberry industry, the rust issues and the other problems with blueberries in this state? In your view, do they currently have the expertise that is necessary to do the work that is required of them?

**Ms BROCK** - No.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It is pretty simple answer.

**CHAIR** - A simple answer, no. I appreciate the answer.

We were previously given evidence this morning that Biosecurity Tasmania has heavily relied on a single report from Dr Strik[ok] to inform their decision-making. Have you any knowledge of that?

**Ms BROCK** - I do. That was a meeting that happened in late November. I believe there were two members. I say, I believe, because I was not present. There was Fruit Growers

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Tasmania, the Australian Blueberry Growers Association - which is Phil Pyke and Greg McCulloch, respectively. There were a couple of members, Mr Tovey[TBC] and I think there was somebody else from Costa's, and I think Peter Skillern was there from the TFGA. They had presented the minister with a report by Bernadine Strik. Dave Barden[TBC], in a personal conversation with me, also referred to this report as almost gospel evidence they were never going to get on top of this and they really need to make it a containment issue. Now it was here on the property, it was never going to work. I queried that because Bernadine Strik is a brilliant lady in her field. Her expertise is nutrition in plants. She is a consultant, hired by Costa's, and has been since about 2009, when they first introduced her to me. She had not written, out of 103 papers that she is author or co-author on, any papers relating to blueberry rust. In fact, the only pathogen she has referred to is the drosophila fly, which is causing some issues in America at the moment. Everything else was to do with mulching and nutrition. I was a bit concerned that there was a wait being placed in the October-November period based upon the report done by a paid consultant of Costa's, on a field she is not even an expert in.

**CHAIR** - Very good. Does the government put any money into any of the industry growers, to your knowledge?

**Ms BROCK** - To my knowledge, no. This particular client has received considerable different grants for coolrooms, I understand, and for access to water irrigation. I remember a conversation with Dave Bardon back in about 2008-2009 about government assistance for worker accommodation. I understand there were also grants for tree breaks.

My concern is, which I wrote in here, about the conflicts of interest. If the government have investment in this particular company, where does the conflict of interest end if they have skin in the game, as far as making a decision at that level? If that is overriding the Biosecurity, why are they overriding Biosecurity? Is it conflict, is it pressure from outside influences? I had some serious issues with this whole decision-making process.

**Ms RATTRAY** - In relation to your encouragement in your submission for the committee to seek a review of the current Plant Quarantine Act and to see its relevance, can you give me some indication of where the committee needs to focus their attention?

**Ms BROCK** - The current Plant Quarantine Act relies heavily on the minister and the secretary having the overriding decision. That is not working. It probably has done in the past, but now we have very qualified corporate farmers hiring very good influencers to influence one or two people. There needs to be a change of system, perhaps a seven vote system, so there is a balance and a broader base or broader stability.

You look back 15 years ago, corporate farming was not what it is now. Corporate farming is going to get bigger, there is no avoiding that. At what extent does the corporate farmer then become a corporate cowboy? It is not fair we have influencers working on one or two people, who they are targeting because they are the decision-makers. It is a natural thing. It does not matter whether it is biosecurity, whether it is oil, gas whatever; it is part of business. We need to start looking at some of the factors we have in the Westminster system. We need to be getting a broader base and a consultative approach, as big as possible.

**Ms RATTRAY** - To have more independence, away from the decision-making process.

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**Ms BROCK** - Yes, exactly. Macquarie Franklin have done a submission for water and for trees for Costa's. Macquarie Franklin has nepotistic links with TR[cannot find organisation TBC]. Where does this end and where is the independence as an advice structure to the decision-makers? We do not have any. There are no forensics on any of this.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Would you suggest because of the way it is structured at this time, that there is a lack of confidence around the rigour of compliance and all those areas?

**Ms BROCK** - I totally agree.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Yes, because of the structure. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Where an outbreak occurs and where there are now some protocols in place about how it should be treated and dealt with, the cleanliness of people working, accessing, moving in and off the properties; if there happen to be transgressions of those protocols, should penalties apply?

**Ms BROCK** - I agree, but there is just one problem - they have to be notified of the transgressions and because we are not notified of the protocols, therefore we cannot notify of transgressions. There is no transparency and they are saying this is intellectual property associated with that particular client. There is a big gap there as to what is transparent and what shouldn't be transparent.

Economic factors, such as how many tonnes, prices, whatever, is stuff that is intellectual property associated with the client and should never be released. However, if we have a public health issue with a pest or pathogen, all farmers should be aware of where things are at, including testing every second week on that property. What are they testing for? How many leaves are on the plant? How many plants are still alive? We have never been privy to those results. Is that property clean and has it been giving clean results for the last six months? None of us know that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - We do it in water quality, don't we?

**Ms BROCK** - We do.

**CHAIR** - We are out of time. I am of the view that the committee might want to ask you back again. That is a decision the committee would have to make and if we did then we would approach you and ask you to come forward, particularly after we have spoken to other witnesses. Other evidence comes up and -

**Ms RATTRAY** - The department of Biosecurity.

**CHAIR** - Yes, and because of your background and your expertise in this area you are considered an important witness to this committee. Having said that, is there anything you want to say in passing that we might not have covered and is critical right at this moment?

**Ms BROCK** - At this stage, no. I look forward to assisting further if you do require further assistance. I am happy to do that and I wish you luck in your investigations.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much. We appreciate your submissions, well done.

## **PUBLIC**

**Ms RATTRAY** - And your knowledge.

**CHAIR** - Absolutely. All the very best and thank you for being here.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

## PUBLIC

**Mr ANDREW RICKETTS** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Andrew, this is a public hearing. Evidence is being taken on oath, so for that purpose I would like you to make a statutory declaration. The public hearing is being recorded on *Hansard* and the records will be made available to the public. A copy of the information for witness has been provided to you have you read through that document. The information for witnesses a document should have been provided to you.

**Mr RICKETTS** -Yes, dated 30 October. Yes, I have that including the Terms of Reference.

**CHAIR** - That is great.

**Mr RICKETTS** -I have read that and I note you wish to know the capacity in which I am appearing.

**CHAIR** - Yes, I will come to that in a moment. In this room here you have parliamentary privilege. You are protected in comments you make to the committee in the same way we are in the House, but you do not have that protection once you leave this room. Once you leave this room, it no longer applies.

If we reach the stage you feel you would like to give evidence to the committee in camera, in confidence, then simply ask the committee that question and the committee will make a determination. You have that option, but we would like you to give whatever evidence you can publicly because that allows us to use it in a more formal way in putting our reports together.

Having said all of that Andrew, at this stage leave it open to you to make any statement you might want to make, if there is any additional information you have, leaving time for us to ask questions.

**Mr RICKETTS** -Thank you. I was interstate when I found out about the hearing, as I mentioned in my submission. I made the submission as a grower of blueberries with a particular interest in blueberry germplasm.

I grow about 55 different cultivars of blueberry and blueberries. They have only been domesticated relatively recently compared to other horticultural crops, such as apples, which have been propagated asexually since Roman times. Blueberries have only been propagated asexually and developed as a crop since 1908. As you are probably aware, blueberries come from North America.

Today they are a complex hybrid plant but, like Tasmania's eucalypts, when you take blueberries to another place you have a number of biosecurity advantages, disease advantages, and Tasmania has those disease advantages over the native North American environments. Just as South America, for example, has advantages in growing eucalypts in plantations, we have advantages in growing blueberries.

The introduction of blueberry rust, which was previously only introduced to New South Wales in the Australian context, is extremely unfortunate. I have been inspected by Biosecurity Tasmania, which is a part of DPIPW. Apart from the role as a grower of blueberry germplasm, regarding other matters but also regarding biosecurity, I work in a community context for a

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community environment organisation, an incorporated association. We are one of the few community environment organisations that takes an interest in biosecurity issues.

Biosecurity is incredibly important. We made a submission during the process of the creation of new biosecurity legislation. We take a general interest in legislation. The biosecurity legislation which, in essence, simplifies a raft of legislation without really looking at the restructure of the biosecurity organisation is, in our view, a missed opportunity.

We see biosecurity in a broad context and not just about blueberries. We see it in the context of things like New Zealand apples and Canadian salmon. We see it in the context of the difficult problems that Tasmania has had recently about things like Tasmanian devil facial tumour disease, which has been spread throughout the state, and the fox. You may not see the fox or devil facial tumour disease as a biosecurity issue but I wish to assure you that it is.

We look at the performance of Biosecurity Tasmania in the context of a wide range of problems that beset Tasmania. I understand this inquiry is about blueberries, but it is important that you understand that in my community interest role, which I cannot ignore -

**CHAIR** - Andrew, on that point, term of reference 4 covers off on this clearly; the capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania to manage blueberry rust outbreaks and other risks into the future.

**Mr RICKETTS** - I do not want to take up all the time talking about the plethora of things - I brought our submission because it is my view that the inquiry into blueberries should inform and not be disadvantaged by the new legislation that is being drafted. I say to you, as members of the upper House, when the legislation comes before you - and it is being created in an unholy rush - often legislation benefits from greater time being taken. This should not be some upcoming election plaything.

The problems of blueberry rust and how it got here, whether there are two outbreaks or whether there is one, whether Biosecurity Tasmania themselves are spreading blueberry rust around the state; those things need to be dealt with.

I was in Sydney when I made the submission. I had taken my car to the mainland. I caught the boat on 18th and ahead of me was this four-wheel-drive, which was caked in dirt. You may not see the connection between blueberries and a four-wheel-drive caked in dirt, but this was -

**Ms RATTRAY** - Blueberries are grown in dirt, do I get the prize?

**Mr RICKETTS** - Yes. That car may well have come from the Coffs Harbour area. It was caked in dirt. I was behind this on the ramp to go into the Spirit of Tasmania. The officer went away to his little booth and came back with a hearth brush. Now, a hearth brush, when you are looking at a Nissan four-wheel-drive; is that going to get rid of blueberry rust spores that are encaked in the dirt or fight off anything else that is of biosecurity concern? I am not an expert in such matters but my gut view is that it will not. My opinion is that we massively need to improve our biosecurity and that would be, in broad terms, my recommendation to the panel.

This four-wheel-drive did not get a proper cleaning. My four-wheel-drive did not get a proper cleaning. It was not completely caked in dirt like the one ahead, but it did not get a proper clean. There is no process for cleaning all the vehicles that go on to the boat.



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When a 457 visa person or, even if they are not a 457 visa person and they are simply an itinerant backpacker or somebody else who is going to enter a blueberry farm, comes along; is there adequate biosecurity for dealing with those people? I argue there is not. There appears, as far as I can see, to be no protocol they should follow apart from, perhaps, if I had a 20 hectare blueberry farm I would need to have something strenuous in place.

**CHAIR** - Andrew, sorry to interject, we want to ask a few questions.

**Mr RICKETTS** - I have a number of documents I wish to table.

**CHAIR** - Excellent. You make the comment here that blueberry rust should be eradicated now. I think you are saying it is that simple. Are you saying it can not be eradicated whilst we have these relaxed quarantine procedures on vehicles and movement?

**Mr RICKETTS** - If you eradicate it. By the way, I am not critical of the people on the ground in Biosecurity Tasmania.

The first people who came out to my property, Tania Jensen and her team, followed my instructions. I have a locked gate. I insisted the car get left two-and-a-half kilometres down the road. She was excellent. I do not think the problem is within the field staff. It is a deeper problem and also at a higher level.

**CHAIR** - I think you have said there should be a restructuring of Biosecurity. Did I understand correctly?

**Mr RICKETTS** - The organisation, yes.

**CHAIR** - How do you see that restructure how do you think it should occur.

**Mr RICKETTS** - I would take it out of the department. I would turn it into a statutory commission and I would make sure when writing the legislation that the commissioners were able to be changed. I would increase the separation between the minister and the department.

I do not think it is appropriate that you have one standard for somebody who may have a limited acreage, but nonetheless it may be their life's income, and a corporation that happens to have holdings all across Australia. I do not perceive there is any different public interest between the small grower, no matter how they are growing, whether they are growing organically or using conventional agricultural methods, and big players. It is my perception there has been a difference in the way the different players have been treated in regards to this.

Yes, we do need to contain this, but if containment is some code for avoiding eradication, then that is not acceptable to me and I have a confidence problem. Theoretically, this is a listed disease.

The department, DPIPWE, can enter my property, yet I now perceive the department may be spreading blueberry rust around the state. This can be transferred; it is quite easy to do that. I am now in an invidious position. I have strict biosecurity safeguards for my property. If I meet with another blueberry grower, I do not go to their property to meet them, I meet at some neutral place. I would not have a blueberry picker come that had been somewhere else in Victoria or New South

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Wales and then enter my property because, at the moment, there is not an adequate system in place to guarantee my property would not get infected.

**CHAIR** - Should protocols, guidelines or written information be provided to all growers with these things they should comply with to ensure the biosecurity on their properties is uppermost?

**Mr RICKETTS** - It is absolutely a biosecurity issue and -

**CHAIR** - The reason I raise this is the production of blueberries in this state is increasing every day. It is becoming a big export product.

**Mr RICKETTS** - My original point is that we can grow them better than the USA can grown them. If you look at climates between 800 mm of rain and 1200 mm of rain across Tasmania, which have got suitable soil conditions of low pH, we have got a lot of land. Whereas when you have soil of low pH, it is not that useful to try to grow certain conventional crops. It becomes an opportunity for all those growers who have that sort of land.

You can grow blueberries instead of trying to lime the bejesus out of it, as long as if you have the conditions right. It is a very useful horticultural crop. It is not like raspberries where you put them for a few years and then they die on you. A blueberry plant can live from 20 to 60 years. They are a long-lived plant. You should view them like apples and so forth. To establish a blueberry orchard and then to have the disease introduced that significantly affects the amount of work you have to do to produce blueberries is very unfortunate.

**Mr WILLIE** - In your submission, you said that if the inquiry does not unearth the various reports and information you will look at other ways of pursuing that -

**Mr RICKETTS** - That is because I had already gone down that road. The trouble is that I did not get the documents I requested, so I am on the verge. It was not meant as a comment about the inquiry, it was meant to say I have been unhappy for a while. I do not have the documents that I politely asked for and if necessary, I will pursue them through whatever means, including the Ombudsman's Office.

**Mr WILLIE** - I was a bit perplexed by that comment. I thought if you had them you could make them available to us.

**Mr RICKETTS** - You are welcome to any documents. I did not know I could put in documents in camera. I have brought documents that I am happy to be made public. I have a pile of them.

**CHAIR** - You can table documents on the basis they treated in confidence, but the committee preference is always for documents to be provided where they are openly and publicly available.

**Mr RICKETTS** - It is my preference, I made comment about openness. I believe there is a culture of secrecy in Biosecurity Tasmania. As I said, that leads you to a crisis of confidence. As somebody who is being inspected and as somebody who supports Biosecurity, to get the stage where you believe you are in an invidious position and it is possible that Biosecurity may actually be spreading blueberry rust, I had a serious problem.

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I would welcome the committee having a solution to that serious problem. Do I allow the next inspection? I have an email from Biosecurity Tasmania. Do I allow them on to my property? They all get up in the suits and things, but it is the vehicle.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Where it has been.

**Mr RICKETTS** - Yes. They wash the top of the vehicle but vehicles are difficult to completely clean.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Andrew.

**Ms RATTRAY** - In regard to Biosecurity and the secrecy, could I suggest that perhaps it is not so much secrecy, perhaps they do not have the right communication processes in place to get the information out to growers? It is even suggested that Biosecurity do not know who all the growers are to inform them. Do you think that may be part of why you feel uninformed?

**Mr RICKETTS** - That is part of it. When you get denied reports, that is different. However, I don't disagree with you. I am tabling a number of emails from Mr Klumph, including my response to Mr Klumph, and I have not had a response to my response. I thought I raised relevant issues. I did not fly off the handle. I like to be on the issue. I have three emails where I responded to Mr Klumph, including all the email addresses. I do not really mind having my email address spread across the planet but there is a page of email addresses that are not the same on each email. There are a number of different email addresses.

**CHAIR** - As much as you refer to them, you might like to table them at this stage.

**Mr RICKETTS** - I have done six copies. Sorry?

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I am saying they should have blind copied them so they did not send everybody's email address.

**Mr RICKETTS** - That is right. The honourable Ms Rattray raised the issue about whether they have adequate mechanisms for communicating. In part, they do have mechanisms for communicating. I believe they were forced into doing this update business. It did not happen from the outset of the second incursion. It happened when they came under additional pressure. That is not the way to run Biosecurity Tasmania. I have not had a response to the issues I have raised.

**CHAIR** - We are tabling those documents.

**Mr RICKETTS** - They are my emails of 10 September 2017, 5 August 2017 and 19 June 2017. I wrote these addressed to Mr Klumph but I sent them to the whole list - 50-odd people. There are six copies of those three.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I have the addresses of 50 growers, so that is a good sign. It is encouraging.

**Mr RICKETTS** - There are more than that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Yes, I know that, but I am saying that it is a good start.

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**Mr RICKETTS** - The issue about who -

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you very much, Andrew. I appreciate your reply to my question.

**CHAIR** - Are there any other questions?

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - You are careful about security on your property. I noticed on the New South Wales Government site they were saying spores are spread by wind and rain. Do you have any neighbours within a couple of kilometres of you, small farms or home growers? How do you avoid spores from, perhaps, someone like me? I grow a couple of plants. As I said, mine do not live 60 years, mine are lucky to live 12 months, unfortunately. How do you go when you have neighbours who may have a couple of little plants that could be infected with blueberry rust. How do you avoid this with a small neighbour that is not a true grower?

**Mr RICKETTS** - From my perspective, my gate is two-and-half kilometres away -

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - From anyone?

**Mr RICKETTS** - From anyone.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - The wind and rain, that would be within a -

**Mr RICKETTS** - I am surrounded by a public reserve, the Reedy Marsh Conservation Area. I have a next-door neighbour that does not live on their property, and the collection of properties in my area are mostly reserved. There is sufficient land within those reserves that somebody could grow blueberries. As it turns out, knowing my neighbours, I know they do not.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I am not thinking farming -

**Mr RICKETTS** - Yes. There is suitable soil at Parkham, to the west of me. That could be within about three kilometres, somebody could grow blueberries.

**CHAIR** - We need to wrap it up. We are out of time and we have to visit the properties.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - You are fairly isolated?

**Mr RICKETTS** - I am fairly isolated but this rust is not highly mobile. If we are out of time, I have some other documents. Do I have to table them?

**CHAIR** - If you wish the committee to have possession of them, yes, I ask you to table them.

**Mr RICKETTS** - That includes the representation over the draft Biosecurity Bill from our community association.

**Mr WILLIE** - Does that include a list of the documents you requested from Biosecurity Tasmania?

**Mr RICKETTS** - No, it does not.

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**Mr WILLIE** - Can we have that too, please?

**Mr RICKETTS** - Yes, and can I write to you with that?

**CHAIR** - You can.

**Mr RICKETTS** - Is there a date where you intend to -

**CHAIR** - We are not going to be able to complete it this year. That is certain. We would hope to be able to conclude it as early as possible next year. That is the committee's position. Any extra documentation you might have, we would ask that you provide that at your earliest opportunity.

**Mr RICKETTS** - I can take these away.

**CHAIR** - Just table them and our secretary will take possession of those documents.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Yes, I do not think you will want to hear from the committee in January by the sound of it. It is the busiest picking time.

**Mr RICKETTS** - It is a busy time, and you have an election in March. Is that right?

**Ms RATTRAY** - Not the upper House. The lower House.

**Mr WILLIE** - The lower House.

**Mr RICKETTS** - Doesn't that affect everything?

**Mr WILLIE** - Yes.

**Mr ARMSTRONG** - It does not stop our committee work, though.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, it does because we are prorogued. Parliament will be prorogued and when Parliament is prorogued it stops all work.

**Ms RATTRAY** - The only committee that can sit while Parliament is prorogued is the Subordinate Legislation Committee and if it needs to, it will.

**Mr RICKETTS** - May I ask whether there has been a -

**CHAIR** - You have to be quick, Andrew, because we have to visit a site.

**Mr RICKETTS** - There is an amount of material that has been reported on in the media. Have you called the media, may I ask?

**CHAIR** - No, we have not and we probably would not.

**Ms RATTRAY** - They usually call us.

**CHAIR** - They call us.

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*Laughter.*

**Mr WILLIE** - There are members of the media here so they will be reporting factual information.

**Mr RICKETTS** - If they have quoted the department - what the department has said to the media in quotes is relevant and is also concerning.

**CHAIR** - Andrew, if you produce a document with that in it the committee is entitled to ask the department questions around that. We would, and that is the way we process that.

**Mr RICKETTS** - In that case, I will write again and I will include these documents.

**CHAIR** - Those documents are considered tabled. Thank you for that. Thank you very much for the way you presented your evidence today. We are sorry, we might be seen to be rushing it, but if the committee deems fit they could ask you to come back again. That is a possibility. Other than that, thank you for your presentation today and your submission. We appreciate it very much.

**Mr RICKETTS** - Thank you for the opportunity. This is an important inquiry.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

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**Mr KENT MAINWARING, AND Ms ALYSSA MAINWARING, BILAMBIL BERRY FARM, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.**

**CHAIR** - We will open the meeting. Thank you for being here today and for allowing us all to have a look at your property a short time ago. It is a beautiful property and we appreciate that. It allowed us to understand more about blueberries and organic blueberry growing.

**Ms RATTRAY** - And the work involved, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Absolutely. We need to go through a few protocols. We are taking sworn evidence and need you to take the statutory declaration in front of you. Today's evidence you give is protected by parliamentary privilege. You are given the same privileges as we are in the House. Once you leave here you no longer have that parliamentary privilege, you stand on your own. The information for witnesses has been provided. Have you read through that document?

**Mr MAINWARING** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - You have, that is good. The evidence will be recorded on *Hansard* and will be published online in due course. If at any stage you feel it would like to give evidence in confidence because you a confidential submission, ask us if we can do that and the committee will make a decision as to how to proceed.

I will give you an opportunity to make an opening statement, should you wish to. You might want to add to your submission or mention something additional. We have 30 minutes, if you could make your opening statement and allow time for questions.

**Mr MAINWARING** - One of the most concerning things about this latest outbreak is the reasoning behind Biosecurity's decision making. Initially, it was very much an economic decision not to move to an eradication program. I can remember at the meeting that was held at Mt Pleasant, for example, they specifically said there are too many jobs and the economic cost of an eradication program would be too much.

At that stage, I do not know what they were basing that decision on. I can only assume it was information provided to Biosecurity by Costa's. I would like to say that none of the information coming from Costa's to Biosecurity, either via the Macquarie Franklin Report that was done or other information coming out; I do not believe the figures that Costa provide can be relied on in any way, shape or form.

After the Macquarie Franklin Report was done - it was only released to the public a couple of weeks ago because it was the subject of a right to information application - since around June of this year, the emphasis has been more, 'scientifically we cannot eradicate rust'. All of a sudden, Biosecurity are now trying to line up all their ducks to get support for their actions on that basis. I do not believe that either the economic or the scientific evidence stacks up. I firmly believe that it is possible to eradicate this disease. I do not believe that, economically, it has been taken into consideration what the effect might be on the remainder of the industry if they do not.

**CHAIR** - You make the point in your open submission, the area Costa said they had and they are taking the greatest precautions and so on. I think you saying that is vastly overestimated. Do you wish to comment further?

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**Mr MAINWARING** - Very much so. The latest ABS statistics on farm produce were released only in 2016, I believe. They stated in that document there were 26 blueberry growers in Tasmania and eight of them were only in development so they were not in production. There were only 18 productive blueberry farms in Tasmania, which is totally not the case. Even Biosecurity were aware of about 50. Since this has all blown up, we are still getting blueberry farmers coming forward and saying, 'I have been growing blueberries down here for ages. Nobody has ever come and asked me anything.'. The numbers continue to go up and up and up. I know that Trish, for example, has got a database now well in excess of 80 growers and there are probably more. When Costa came out and say they are 75 per cent of the industry and represent 80 per cent of the product; I ship fruit in conjunction with another grower, Steve Beams, down at Yorktown. Nobody has ever asked. In the 10 years we have been on the farm, nobody has ever asked us how much we produce. I think Jeremy Rockliff, as the minister, is very keen to promote the agricultural product in the state. I think the first thing he has to do is learn how to count. There is a lot more product here there -

**Ms RATTRAY** - Or at least source the information -

**Mr MAINWARING** - At least source the information from reliable sources. It was very much the same; Costa's quoted a figure at one stage of \$200 per plant to remove a blueberry plant. I would like the job because I reckon I could do five an hour, and I put a 10-hour day in. That, I think, indicates the figures they produce cannot really be relied on. That is my personal opinion.

**CHAIR** - Sorry to be interrupting you.

**Mr MAINWARING** - Enough said in that regard, I think.

**CHAIR** - It seems from what you are saying there is that Costa's have, in your view, influenced the position and the decision taken by Biosecurity in containing rather than eradicating the rust.

**Mr MAINWARING** - Very much so. I mentioned in my submission, at one stage, that when rust was first discovered in New South Wales there was a couple of interesting things that happened. They believed the rust was brought into Australia by Ridley Bell on a trip to South America. Rust was first located on the Bell's property. At that stage, there was a great call for it to be eradicated. Two or three weeks later it was discovered on a farm owned by Costa's, and all of a sudden everyone is saying they could manage it now, that they did not have to eradicate it. They have been in a management phase up there ever since.

One of Costa's publications said the main variety they were growing in those days was called Sharpie Blue and they found it too difficult to control rust in that particular variety. In the end they just pulled the plants out and replaced them. Macquarie Franklin indicate in their report that the variety of evergreen blueberries that Costa's have problems with at the moment are a variety called Legacy. They are highly susceptible to blueberry rust. I can only assume that it was a commercial decision made by Costa's, realising they were operating in a rust-free zone, that they had planted this variety. It would be because of production values, yield or whatever.

Because those plants are highly susceptible to rust, as identified by the Macquarie Franklin report, it is quite possible that in the next couple of years Costa's will make the decision to replace those plants if they continually find that it is too hard to control the rust in them. Maybe they will



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pull them out and replace them with something that is easier to control rust in. Why those steps were not taken, why they did not just recognise that initially, I do not know.

**CHAIR** - Interesting.

**Mr WILLIE** - That variety is evergreen?

**Mr MAINWARING** - Yes. With the evergreen varieties, the other thing is that we cannot understand from a production point of view, why would you run the risk of putting evergreens in with your main crop? They apparently increase your yield but the percentages are open to question. Is it 5 per cent or 10 per cent? Nobody can seem to agree on it because there is never any real control test being done. In search of that elusive extra 5 per cent yield; we would not ever risk the remainder of our operation because of it. In this particular case it has worked out that they have been caught through bad management.

That is the other thing I would go on to say. Bad management being; there are around 80 blueberry growers in the state and up until 12 months ago only one of them had rust. These were people who were used to working in an area where rust was endemic. They knew the dangers and they still brought it onto their property. With us, our chief risk manager lives in the house with me but Costa's, he is a resident in Sydney or somewhere. I believe that is one of the reasons. They have no skin in the game.

**CHAIR** - That is impacting on the whole industry?

**Mr MAINWARING** - Yes. When Macquarie Franklin were studying the economic impacts of what this might mean for the state, there is not mention in that document of how much value is going to be taken away from both conventional growers and organic growers. Organic growers in particular, and us personally I suppose. If rust becomes endemic in the state we are going to go from having a viable economic unit to something that is not going to support a family, full stop. How much that is going to cost us, I do not know. If you run that across all of the organic growers in the state and the older, conventional growers; where they cannot get machinery into their orchards and they are going to have to pull out plants and redevelop everything. There is no mention of the economic cost of that, where they have based their decision and recommendations at all.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - As well as the vulnerable species and your farm, as you mentioned in your submission.

**Mr MAINWARING** - Quite correct. The initial enquiry by Macquarie Franklin was supposed to look at social, economic and environmental impacts. I noticed in their final report that there is nothing at all about the environmental impacts. I do not want to pre-empt evidence you might hear from other sources. The chap I ship fruit with, Steve Beams, is located at Yorktown and as to his water source, the next person after Steve is Yorktown Organics. If Steve has to start spraying his blueberry crop, is it going to affect or impinge on the operations of Yorktown Organics? I do not know, my personal opinion again, but Yorktown Organics is one of the leading lights for the organic industry in Tasmania.

**CHAIR** - I note the meeting in Launceston in September 2016. You make reference to a survey; I think Biosecurity Tasmania indicated to the 12 present respondents at that meeting that

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the results of that survey would be provided. What was that survey about and were you provided with the results?

**Mr MAINWARING** - The survey was conducted by Macquarie Franklin. They were contracted to do that. No, the results of that weren't ever released. I submitted a right to information request for the document. At the same time, I noticed on Biosecurity's website that a member of parliament asked for the same report, and I think that was released at about the same time. There was a little bit of other information they released. I asked for a copy of that back in February and it was deemed to be commercial-in-confidence at that stage.

Why they went from a position of, 'the respondents would be provided', to, 'no, we cannot release this information', is, I believe, because it does not fully support Biosecurity's position to contain as opposed to eradicate.

**CHAIR** - That was going to be my next question. The question has been asked this morning, how do you see Biosecurity's record or their working record in controlling blueberry rust? Are you of the opinion they are not up to the standards necessary to control and consider this matter, or are there other issues?

**Mr MAINWARING** - First, the frontline staff that called my property phoned only moments before you called this morning to arrange a time to come tomorrow and inspect.

**Ms RATTRAY** - They heard we were coming.

**Mr MAINWARING** - Maybe they did. I have the utmost respect for them. They are very conscientious, they are highly respectful of our organic status and always have been. The staff on the ground are good. No problems there, at all.

I am starting to believe there may be under-resourcing in the area because these infected plants still continue to make it into the state. With regard to their response to the 2014 incursion, I do not think you could have asked for a more comprehensive or better response. I believe that came from the very top. The decision was made; we were going to eradicate, the necessary resources were applied and everything was done. With this, the lack of resources is already starting to show and properties such as ours, any commercial producer that wants to export fruit to South Australia or Victoria, will now have to be inspected two or three times during the season.

Whether they are up to do it properly, I haven't got the confidence at all. That stems from decisions at the top of Biosecurity. The frontline staff are still trying to do the best they can but the decisions are at the top. That impacts on the blueberry industry and a lot of other agricultural pursuits.

I make mention in my submission - the example was the green snails from Western Australia. If somebody got them and they are growing on strawberries on the side of the road, not a problem. If they got in at Hillwood, for example, where they are producing 1000 tonnes of strawberries a year and you turn around to Simon Dornoff and tell him he has to pull all you plants out, he is going to say, that is severely impact me financially. You might say, I can understand that but, unfortunately, they have to go. It does not matter whether you have one acre or 100 acres. The response should be the same and that has not been displayed in this case.

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**CHAIR** - Another area of concern you raised has been mentioned in other submissions. We had the two outbreaks in 2014-15 year but Biosecurity does not seem to have put anything in place since that time to address the issue, should it arise again, and/or made changes to legislation or whatever might be necessary to ensure they gain proper control in future outbreaks. Do you wish to comment?

**Mr MAINWARING** - I have to qualify my answer here a little. This is the first piece of legislation I have really gone through and studied to any great degree. The legislation, as it stands, is fairly good to the degree that it provides all the necessary powers to the minister to control things like this.

Where it is a little bit lacking is there is nothing mandatory. There is no obligation for the minister to do anything on an outbreak like this. He can defer to the secretary and the secretary could make a decision after taking advice.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Which he did, in this case.

**Mr MAINWARING** - That is right. There is nothing that says, 'you have to do 'x' or this will happen', or, 'there will be an eradication program, if at all possible', or whatever.

The legislation gives the minister the power to override the secretary at any time. The minister could turn around and say, you will instigate a control program and you will eradicate this disease. Whereas, the minister stands back and says it is a decision made at arm's length and it has nothing to do with me. Well, it is to do with him, very much so. He holds the ultimate power to tell the secretary to instigate a control program and eradicate this disease.

The necessary powers are there. Perhaps the political will is lacking at the moment. I made mention also of compensation payments. There is provision for compensation to be paid but, unfortunately, the legislation is rather quiet on who should pay it, how much and how that figure is determined. Something like that should be addressed if there were going to be changes.

The blueberry growers I have spoken to about this are conscious of the economic impact. If any one individual got blueberry rust and had to remove their whole orchard or they lost production for a number of years, perhaps there should be an industry levy or something like that to fund it. Once it reached a certain level, if it is not drawn on, it can sit there. As long as the government don't take it for consolidated revenue, there is always going to be something there to fund the compensation.

**CHAIR** - As a grower, are you given, and what access do you have to, a set of guidelines as to what you should do on your property in relation to security? That is, to prevent these fungal diseases, rust diseases and so on. What documentation do you receive, as a grower? What can you access online with Biosecurity, for instance? Is there anything?

**Mr MAINWARING** - Biosecurity are a little bit better in that regard, I suppose. One of the reasons they don't know how many blueberry growers there are is that I don't have to register anywhere. If you wanted to plant 50 acres of blueberries, you could. You don't have to ask permission, apply, get a licence, register or anything like that.

**Ms RATTRAY** - What about through council, local government?

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**Mr MAINWARING** - No. Even for our packing shed and whatever else, I do not have to register or ask permission from the local government authorities.

We have a Biosecurity plan for our farm and rules, we call them, in place as to what you can and cannot do. For example, Alyssa and I don't employ anybody who has been picking blueberries in New South Wales. That might sound cruel and hard, but I can't run the risk.

We have protocols like that, but there is nothing to stipulate, to say we have to do things or we have to guard against this or that. Even now, friends of mine on the mainland are big producers of blueberry plants. I can ring up and order plants and bring them in if I want to. They are supposed to be checked by Biosecurity before they come in. In the current environment I would hope that was the case, but you don't know whether it is done.

We have a couple of shops in Morty's complex. Over the years we have gone through a lot of boxes of pineapples and bananas. You would be surprised at some of the creepy-crawlies that have crept out of those boxes, despite the fact they have been through ethobromide treatment or whatever.

**CHAIR** - Would you be suggesting there should be some form of registration with the department if a new blueberry grower is coming into the market? Perhaps it should be the case, to let Biosecurity know they have another grower in the state.

**Mr MAINWARING** - I believe there has to be a central repository, more for putting information out to people, not so much as a reporting thing and to find out what they are doing. I also believe there should be a bit of feedback on production levels and whatever, so we know what the value of the industry in Tasmania is. The ABS reckons it was about \$100 million. It might be. It might be \$200 or \$400 million. I do not know. As I say, nobody has ever asked us how much value we get from our blueberries each year. So, they have a guess? I don't know.

Yes, I think there would be value in something like that for a flow of information from the central body of Biosecurity out to growers. I am still waiting for an email from Biosecurity after the latest detection at Sheffield. They have all our email addresses. I know no more than what I can read in *The Examiner*, and yet they have all of our contact details. It came out late last week and my complaint about the second and third incursions is that they were detected within the containment zone at Costa's. That was detected in March and that information was withheld from the public until June.

If I have the Visy representative ring up and say he was doing the rounds and to and see how much packaging I wanted for the coming season - which happened to Steve Beams. He asked to the representative, 'Have you been to Costa's?'. He said, 'No, haven't been to Costa's', to which the answer was, 'Okay, you can come onto the farm'. We do not know whether that representative had been to the other two places. Whether the representative has been to the place at Sheffield - I do not even know where it is. Information like that, I think should be given. I do not know why they have not learned their lesson and put this information out to growers.

**Mr WILLIE** - We had a brief conversation at the farm and you were saying a lot of your exports are heading to South Australia, you are an organic blueberry grower and that is not a problem for you at the moment. Are you worried about that collapsing in future?

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**Mr MAINWARING** - Very much, Josh. The arrangements for us to export fruit into Victoria and South Australia this last couple of years have been based on individual certificates of freedom issued to each property. You have to have one of those and they have to receive copies of that with each shipment you send.

I believe that is a goodwill gesture by both the Victorian and South Australian governments. I can also see, in the near future, we now have four properties with rust in Tasmania. If that increases to 10, in the end they are not going to accept those individual freedom of rust certificates for each individual property. We are a bit insulated where we are, being tucked away in the middle of the bush. If you have a blueberry farm that has rust, and one next to it that is rust-free, I do not think they are going to rely on a certificate of freedom of rust from the second property to allow them to put fruit into those jurisdictions. I don't know how long it will be before it comes to that. Hopefully we can still export into those markets next season. If they turn around and say, 'No, you have to spray your fruit before they come in as we are going to be extra careful', then all of a sudden I cannot put certified organic fruit into those markets. Nobody from Tasmania, from New South Wales or Queensland can, because they have rust there and the same protocols will apply.

It does concern me when 60 per cent of our business goes to those two states. If I had to then turn around and try sell all of that fruit in Sydney and Brisbane, all it does is depress the price. I know of other certified organic growers who are going to be doing exactly the same thing. In the end, do you start to spray and to sell your fruit as conventionally-grown fruit? We have been at the farm for 10 years and dealing with these wholesalers. The farm, since its inception, has been dealing with the one wholesaler in Sydney for 40 years. They handle certified organic product. If I start spraying that is the end of that relationship. I will then have to find somebody else to sell my fruit to, and hopefully try to establish a market somewhere else. It is of much concern.

I have a friend just up the road from us who is planting a 5000 plant orchard. He sourced most of his plants from me. In the next couple of years, he is going to have to look to put nets over his orchard. I reckon it is going to cost him \$200 000, and he is now seriously questioning whether that investment should be made.

**Mrs MAINWARING** - He is a certified organic farmer.

**Mr MAINWARING** - He is certificate organic with ACA.

**Mrs MAINWARING** - He is in the same boat as us in that he cannot spray.

**Mr MAINWARING** - Again, he did not participate in this Macquarie Franklin Report. His future investment is not reflected in that and neither is ours. When they have estimated how much it will cost the state if rust becomes endemic or is considered to be part of the scene, I do not think they have taken any of that into account whatsoever. I believe they have accepted most of it, the information that Costa's have given them, at face value and that was the end of it.

**Mr WILLIE** - We are talking about what has happened a lot. What would you like to see from Biosecurity?

**Mr MAINWARING** - A couple of things, I suppose. Everybody now realises the majority of these problems are caused by evergreen plants. Perhaps there should be a quarantine station or there a facility. If you want to import those plants into the state they should go to a quarantine

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station and be kept there for a reasonable amount of time to make sure they are 100 per cent clear. That would be the first thing. The second, I do not think it is too late to move to an eradication program even now, I really do not. With the advances in knowledge of this I believe they can and should move to an eradication program.

I know it is going to affect Costa's, but we are talking about a company with a turnover of \$1 billion a year, and profits of \$50 or \$60 million going north. Even if the state government has to assist with some of those costs, I think it should be done for the ongoing good of the industry in Tasmania. At a later time you will be speaking to Greg McCulloch from the Australian Blueberry Growers' Association. He reported back to me after his last trip to South-East Asia. He said, you go to these places and you deal with these large wholesalers that import lots of fruit and vegetables. He asked where they got their product from and they said, from all over, from New Zealand, Canada, Australia and Tasmania.' He said, 'And Tasmania?', Tasmania is a separate country?', and the reply was, 'We only get the best from Tasmania'.

That is honestly what goes through the minds of a lot of people in South-East Asia. Something like this as the start of the end of that. They are just talking about getting blueberries into China now. Who is to say the Chinese will not turn around and say they will take our blueberries but they are not going to take them from anywhere they have blueberry rust because they do not want blueberry rust in China.

**CHAIR** - Kent, I have to call it to an end. The committee may want to ask both of you back in due course. We will be in contact with you in the near future. Thank you for your evidence.

**Ms RATTRAY** - And the visit, too.

**CHAIR** - Thank you for the visit and for the way you have answered the questions. We appreciate that. May your blueberries produce very well and things go well for you this year.

**Mr MAINWARING** - You can get them from Mr Barber in Charles St.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Or my son-in-law.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

## PUBLIC

**Mr STEVE BEAMS AND Ms ADELLE LYNCH**, DAZZLERRANGE ORGANIC BERRY FARM, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Thank you for your attendance today. As we are taking evidence on oath we require that you take this statutory declaration. These proceedings are being recorded on *Hansard* and will be made available to the public in due course. It is a public session. You are entitled to public privilege in this meeting, but once you walk out of this room it no longer applies. If you talk to the press or anybody else, you will stand on your own. If at any stage through the proceedings you would like to share something in confidence, simply ask the committee or ask myself as the Chair and we will make that decision.

You have provided a submission to us. You have an opportunity, either one or both of you, to make a statement if you would like to and we will go on with questions.

**Mr BEAMS** - Our submission is a public submission. There is nothing in it that I would be unhappy with if anyone should see. If I am going to drag a point or two out of it, it is that our involvement in the certified organic industry in Tasmania has been long. It probably started back in the 1990s, when I facilitated a national conference of the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture in Tasmania.

Originally, it was at the old AMC college in Newham. I had been working with clients at the time, certified organic growers. Since that time, the organic industry has grown at around 20 to 30 per cent per year in volume and in value. That continues today. The blueberry industry is similar in that since we have been in it, it has grown 20 to 30 per cent in volume every year, not so much in value for conventional product but certainly in the organic product grown every year.

We see blueberry rust in Tasmania as a huge barrier to investment from our own perspective, and to anyone considering investment in Tasmania in any sort of certified organic operation, whether it be blueberries or any other product, from a biosecurity point of view.

We think the system, whilst it has a strong legislative base, does not have a very strong operational base due to a change four or five years ago during which Biosecurity Tasmania went from being Quarantine Tasmania and went down a self-regulation path. It was probably an ideological cost-saving exercise. Since then, they have essentially been pushing away from government regulation, government control of imports of products and monitoring of products.

Tasmania is unique in that it is an island in Australia. It has controlled access for everything in relation to airports, ports and freight. It has a huge advantage from a biosecurity point of view. It has a disadvantage being a costly place to export from. We see Tasmania as having a unique position of being able to say we are one of the clean and green. I don't really like the word green, but we are one of the cleaner places to grow fruit and veggies in this country, probably in the world, because of where we are. We need to take advantage of that.

Every time I hear a politician or someone else talk about deregulation, cutting red tape, cutting green tape and things like that, all I see in my head is a picture of the Grenfell Tower fire in London and things like blueberry rust. They are contrasting in their devastation, I know, but that is what I see.

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We have had that push in this state for some time. I worked in Western Australia in 2012-14 on a project that had a very high level of biosecurity. I got to know some of the biosecurity people in Western Australia and they talked about how they had 25 per cent of the pests the rest of Australia had.

**CHAIR** - How long were you in the biosecurity industry there, Steve?

**Mr BEAMS** - I was not working in biosecurity. I was a stevedore in Tasmania, and we trained to be biosecurity officers, as such, and we were given a certificate. The Western Australian project I worked on was sending equipment and materials to a Class A reserve in the north of Australia. Everything had to be triple/quadruple checked, with brand new machinery wrapped in plastic, sprayed and so on. It was probably one of the largest biosecurity efforts ever seen in this country. They talked about the value, and that was going to a place that had no economic activity apart from oil and gas. They talked about Western Australia having this biosecurity value because it did not have these pests. I see Tasmania as being one of those places and I do not think we value it enough.

We started our farm from scratch on a bit of old log ground we bought cheap, which is how a lot of organic farmers start. We always had a plan that we would grow something of value on it. We put 20 years into it, a lot of it in cash and a lot of it in sweat equity, and all the returns from the business have gone back into the business. This is an existential threat to our business. We do not believe we will get blueberry rust because we have had a very strong biosecurity plan and rules and implementation since 2014, since the original incursion.

We took advice from industry people in New South Wales and from the Victorian equivalent of Biosecurity Tasmania on what we should do. We found Biosecurity Tasmania were scrambling all the time to deal with this. Whilst they got us together and made lots of promises as to what they would do, keep growers informed and things like that, they did not keep those promises.

**CHAIR** - Steve, you have said you have a strong biosecurity plan in place. Can you be satisfied that, to your knowledge, other growers have a strong biosecurity plan in place?

**Mr BEAMS** - Some of the growers I know personally and we do not travel to each others' farms. That is one of the parts of our biosecurity plan. We see that in a risk management sense and we use the hierarchy of risk. By not going to another farm, that eliminates that risk.

**CHAIR** - Should it be a requirement of all producers, that they provide written documentation to the department on their plans as to their biosecurity?

**Ms RATTRAY** - It sounds like a bit more red and green tape.

**Mr BEAMS** - It is no use having a plan, a lovely piece of paper, if no-one tests it. If no-one audits it then it is not worth the paper it is written on.

**CHAIR** - How often would Biosecurity visit your property?

**Mr BEAMS** - Every season since the first incursion in 2014. They have been around two or three times.



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**CHAIR** - Before that?

**Mr BEAMS** - No. It is a government separation from the industries they represent and so on. In the old days, the department of agriculture would have had field officers and people that go out. They would have been connected to the old Agricultural Bank, those sorts of things. That is time gone by. We do not expect that but they do not even seem to do any coordination.

We, deliberately, because I worked in government in the past, do not have anything to do with government. We can access what we need to know from a whole heap of sources these days without having to deal with government people. We do not compete in any awards, we do not do any of that sort of stuff, so we do not really need to have any dealings with government, as such. We do -

**Ms RATTRAY** - What about their website?

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes, we can access that. You do not need to meet face-to-face.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You do not need to call them up?

**Mr BEAMS** - No. When we set up our farm 20 years ago, we got advice from a couple of people within DPIPW then, from growers and from organic growers, who we trusted. Would that advice be available now? I do not think so. I doubt it.

Getting back to a biosecurity plan, yes, we have one. I think Adelle may have even written it down.

**Ms LYNCH** - Nearly.

**Mr BEAMS** - Essentially, we do not have people on our farm.

**Ms RATTRAY** - She is the plan. We know another plan.

**Mr BEAMS** - We do not have anyone on our property. We do not have unplanned visits on our property. These are not farm clothes. It is simple as that. There are farm clothes and there are non-farm clothes. We dip our feet every time we go in and outside the property.

**Mr WILLIE** - You lock the gate?

**Ms LYNCH** - Wash our clothes.

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes, and we have been doing that since 2014. There is a cost to that in laundry. There is a personal cost to it because we do not have visitors to the farm. There is an opportunity cost in that we cannot do things like farm stay or Airbnb, things that have been encouraged and suggested to us because of where we are.

**Ms LYNCH** - Pick your own.

**Mr BEAMS** - Pick your own. We cannot do any of those things.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That was really popular, wasn't it?

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**Mr BEAMS** - From a risk management point of view, you go through the hierarchy and you eliminate all those things. Kent talked earlier about the busy representative. The busy representative rang me and asked if she could come to the farm. I know they sell packaging to Costa. I asked if he dealt with Costa. She said, 'No, I do not. I only deal with small farmers.'. That was in the end of May and there had been another incursion at two small growers near the Costa farms, and this person dealt with small farms. I do not know whether she had been to them or not. I said, we will be your first visitor, your car will be clean, you will not be wearing clothes you have worn somewhere else and we will put you through a dip.

**Ms RATTRAY** - We will meet you in town?

**Mr BEAMS** - If I had known there had been another incursion we would have met her at a coffee shop.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You would have met her in town.

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes. She left the company shortly after that, so I do not know. They are our rules. The people we employ are local people. We try to employ the same people every year and we use those people to vet people for us for, new employees.

**CHAIR** - Did Adelle want to make comment as well?

**Ms LYNCH** - No, he is doing a good job.

**Ms BEAMS** - She will interrupt me if she feels she needs to.

**CHAIR** - In your submission mention the inconsistency of Biosecurity Tasmania's approach is a concerning issue, as was the tackling of the subsequent incursions post-2014. You state, 'Commitments made to growers at meetings in 2014 have not been kept.'. Can you expand on what some of those commitments might have been and what went wrong?

**Mr BEAMS** - One of those commitments was to communicate with us, talk to us, let us know and consult with us. I am on the email advice list with Biosecurity. I get all of their alerts, and we were getting nothing. It reached the point where we had these meetings, these things were going to happen and these two farmers had been essentially wiped out of their blueberries, things like that. They told us they would keep us up to date and it just did not happen. I have every email we ever received and it just did not happen. We reached the point where we were frustrated. We thought we would try to talk to the minister. We wrote to the minister, and again did not get a reply. We eventually received a very garbled reply after the second or third incursion had occurred.

We went to Agfest to talk to people. I would run into Biosecurity people I knew and I would ask them what is going on with blueberry rust. They would say, 'I don't know', or, 'that person is away'. We went to Agfest and we sought out the minister. Unfortunately, we picked the wrong day. He was still in Parliament. We did not get him, so we went to the Biosecurity tent. We asked people there, we waited around and talked to people. They might say a particular person knows all about it. Then I talked to the that person and they might say they know anything about it and you will need to talk to someone in Devonport. At that time, they knew there was another incursion.

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Part of our risk management is that we do not go to places where there are people who work on those farms and we do not go to places where those infected farms are. From the research we have done into it and the advice we have received from New South Wales and other places, it is basically transmitted by people, plants and machinery.

Travelling through the air is something that was thrown up at us during the early days. We told it would go everywhere and it will be in the air. We do not necessarily believe that case is as strong as it has been made out to be, although it has been justified from day one that we cannot eradicate this now because it will travel through the air.

**CHAIR** - It has been raised today. If there is an incursion such as the one we have now, should all producers, all blueberry growers and plant providers be notified immediately by Biosecurity, by email? You would all have email, I would think?

**Mr BEAMS** - I initially got it via rumour and then I received an email yesterday. It gave no detail as to where it was. It said it was in the north of the state. We know it is at Sheffield. They have obviously told the media it is at Sheffield. The email I got from Lloyd Klumph was that it is in the north of the state, which is, as we all know, a pretty large area. Those commitments were not met.

**Ms LYNCH** - These people may go to farmers markets and that is another area where it can spread.

**Mr BEAMS** - We do not go to markets any more.

**Ms LYNCH** - We are very restricted in what we do now.

**CHAIR** - All because of the risk of infestation?

**Mr BEAMS** - The chances of catching and transmitting the rust from that sort of contact are low but the consequences are catastrophic for our business.

There have been farm hygiene plans around for a long time. One of the things that affect blueberries is phytophthora fungus. It is the same sort of process of keeping phytophthora off your place; all your machinery is washed, your boots and things like that, all the mud. It is the same sort of thing. We have been doing that since we started.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You talked about resigning your membership from the peak body.

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It would have been a big call. You have chosen TFGA as being a supportive peak body group. Can you walk me through that?

**Mr BEAMS** - Again, when the political decision was made by the Government to contain rather than eradicate with the second incursion; this is stuff I do not know because they do not tell us. When we ask these questions they do not tell us. I have talked to quite a few people and I cannot find any of the blueberry growers that I know, including a meeting with a large group, who were consulted about that. Were either of these two groups, whether it be fruit growers of

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Tasmania or ABGA; were they consulted? What did they say? As far as I understand, they did not consult either.

**Ms RATTRAY** - They did not come back to their growers, offer any options and ask for your views?

**Mr BEAMS** - Given the outcome and the decision made, I am fairly sure they came back to one grower. Those organisations are probably not for us because we are no longer members. There are questions they need to answer.

**Ms RATTRAY** - We will have an opportunity.

**Mr BEAMS** - I was at Port Arthur on the weekend and I got bailed up by an FTT[TBC] board member and asked questions about it. I told that person I have put a submission in and I cannot talk about it. I said there are some serious questions you need to ask of the people you employ and what happened. I do not know what happened in those meetings. Someone needs to find out because, as far as we know, blueberry growers were not consulted in the main.

In a decision making process and in a political environment, politicians make decisions all the time about it. I become very tired of politicians that will say, this decision was made at arm's length and we let these departments do their thing. When I see the minister for agriculture make a decision about an irrigation scheme in his local area, impacting on people on his area very close to him, and making quite clear in the media he has made that decision, that is another piece of inconsistency from a political point of view.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Thank you. I appreciate your response.

**CHAIR** - In your submission you mention -[OK]

... a problem with how those regulating and enforcing those requirements have been inconsistent in the application of their powers and responsibilities, if you are a small certified organic grower, you will be treated differently to a large corporate low cost/low value grower.

Then you go on to talk about accessing the minister and the department. Are you able to access the department as you see fit or should be able to?

**Mr BEAMS** - I do not have it here. I can send you the last email I got back from Lloyd Klumph, which was; don't talk to me, talk to these other people. That was an exchange about trying to find out whether there would be people from infected farms at the biosecurity workshops they were holding. I kept asking but they would not tell me. Again, from a risk management point of view, I do not want to be in the same room as someone who works on one of these farms.

**CHAIR** - That email may be of interest to the committee if you want to have it tabled and provide it to us.

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes, I can send it through. It was different to the tone of the emails we got at the earlier stages, asking if we were open to communication and so on.

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We do not have the money to employ a former prime minister's adviser as our political go-to person in this sort of situation. We lobby our local politicians when we can. Our first approach was to the department and the minister, not to opposition members or legislative council members. That was our approach because, in a political sense, the department and minister needs to have the opportunity to do the right thing.

**CHAIR** - What would you say we should be considering or should be putting forward to make a difference in the way these matters are now actioned and with what is happening in this industry? What would you suggest or recommend to us?

**Mr BEAMS** - The best form of containment of blueberry rust in Tasmania is eradication. We often talk about, in the organic industry, growing under organic principles and there is no spray and so on. There is only certified organic or there is not. That is what the market tells us. The market tells us now that investment in this state, in the organic industry and things like it, will be curtailed by this sort of outbreak.

**Ms RATTRAY** - What about cutting back to the ground level?

**Mr WILLIE** - Or defoliating the plants?

**Mr BEAMS** - We only use plants that are deciduous. The advice we got in 2014 from the then industry officer in New South Wales was that Tasmania is the best place you can eradicate blueberry rust because it is so cold and most of the plants are deciduous. We were told if we did get it, we would probably get rid of it with copper sulphate, which is an input we could use.

From our market point of view, it would reduce our market to New South Wales and Queensland. We would be fighting all the organic growers in Tasmania, who would then be trying to put their product in at that time, so we would get less for it. It would make our business unviable. Our business is viable and doing quite well.

**Ms LYNCH** - Victoria was able to eradicate it, even though they have a land border.

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes.

**Mr WILLIE** - If your farm was infected with blueberry rust, would you be happy to eradicate it?

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - You would not be happy -

**Mr WILLIE** - You would be prepared to state it on the record, that is what I am getting at.

**Mr BEAMS** - When the first two farmers were impacted, I listened to them on the radio and I met one of them consequently. I thought what happened and how it happened to them was terrible but, I thought, that is what has to happen. Kent and I talked about it. We propagate our own plants and said we would be happy to supply plants to help them get going again but that did not eventuate.

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We talk about funds and things like that to support people who go through that process. Blueberry growers can opt in or out of paying a levy now. It goes to Horticulture Australia to run projects for low cost, high volume growers, not for organic growers. It would be very difficult. We have all gauged what we would do if we were infected. We have advice from our market in Victoria and their advice is: stay organic; stay certified; and do not de-value your product, you will sell it into a smaller market. We have investigated other ways of marketing our fruit. It would be tough. We put in -

**Ms RATTRAY** - It would be gut-wrenching.

**Mr BEAMS** - Yes. I met one of the gentlemen who is a farmer and his health has been impacted by it. We will be really honest with you, our involvement in the blueberry industry is coming to an end. We are going to put our farm on the market, essentially because it is not fun any more. All of this impacts on the capital value of the farm as well. It is our retirement plan.

**CHAIR** - Steve and Adelle, thank you very much. Thank you for the offer of visiting your farm as well. We have visited an organic farm today so we will probably not need to visit a second. Thank you for your submission.

**Ms RATTRAY** - It was well detailed.

**CHAIR** - Yes. Thank you for the way you have given your evidence today. We appreciate that. We may want to raise some further issues with you and if we do, we would come back to you. If you could provide that document to us it would be helpful to the committee. We would appreciate it very much.

**Mr BEAMS** - I have every email.

**CHAIR** - Thank you both.

**Ms RATTRAY** - All the best with the sale and pending retirement.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

## **PUBLIC**

**Ms TRISH MACFARLANE** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Welcome to the table. I will ask you to make the statutory declaration. You have heard the rest about the *Hansard*, it is a public session and you have parliamentary privilege while you are with us today, but outside you do not. It will be recorded and provided publicly for anybody who wishes to see it. You have provided two submissions to us. One is in confidence and we will steer clear of that. The other is an open submission and that is where we will direct most of our questions.

I will give you the opportunity to make any statement, adding to your submission. If we reach a stage you feel you would like to give the evidence in camera, in confidence, then please ask. The committee will make a determination on it.

Trish, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I typed one up but it will take me too long to read it out and I will probably get upset.

**CHAIR** - Do you want to make some comments on it?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I might give it to you rather than read it. I do not think the heartstrings think are going to -

**Ms RATTRAY** - You have sat and listened through a lot today.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, and it brings it all home and makes it very real. I think it is probably -

**CHAIR** - Did you want to make a statement, Trish, or go straight into questions?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes. I think, from the things I have already heard today, we are all coming from the same page. We are all very worried about the attacks of all of this and we are very worried about the fact that there is a solution. A solution has been offered to Biosecurity by a number of different people at a number of different meetings and they still continue to say no. From my point of view, you have an industry, no matter whether you are organic, whether you are pick your own or whether you are a conventional grower, you have essentially got an industry at its knees asking for help.

We have had no support whatsoever from the ABGA. They did not advise us, as growers, of the 2016 incursion at Costa's until a message was put on their Facebook page asking why they had not advised everybody. To which, a few days later, they put up the fact the incursion had happened. They did not send an email to any of us directly, as members. We feel we have been severely let down by them. They have washed their hands of all of us and they have not really offered any support. We feel like we have had to do this ourselves. We have had to form our own group and we have had to rely on each other without any support whatsoever. That, from a grower's perspective, leaves you wondering how this happened, why it happened and how can we fix it? Without a voice, who do we turn to?

**CHAIR** - How do you go with FGT?

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**Ms RATTRAY** - You do not have to answer that.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I no longer have a relationship with FGT. If they were the last industry body on this planet, I would not have anything to do with FGT. They have not supported us. Sorry, I take that back. They did support us in the beginning but they changed sides and I have no faith in their ability to represent us as an industry body at all.

**CHAIR** - You said you formed your own group. What is that group, Trish?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - We have not formed it legally. It was a few of us getting together, realising the industry was bigger than we had even imagined, and it ended up playing itself out. I trawled Facebook, Instagram, papers, yellow pages, Snapchat, you name it - all these things I have never used in my life - to uncover as many people in this beautiful state as I could.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You turned detective, Trish.

**Ms MACFARLANE** -Yes. There are few of us that have ended up turning detective, just to try and get some sort of comprehension as to exactly what we represented. We are a lot bigger than we first thought and I have not finished yet, may I say. There are still more growers I have managed to uncover and there are a lot of new growers that are buying plants that are coming onstream in the next couple of years. There are a lot of growers that have their expansion plans on hold awaiting the outcome of this.

**CHAIR** - If I have it wrong, please tell me, but you were saying you didn't think Biosecurity were listening, they were not taking heed or notice of you?

**Ms MACFARLANE** -Absolutely.

**CHAIR** - Can you expand on that, Trish.

**Ms MACFARLANE** -Yes, I can. I have not been personally present at the meetings, let me make that completely clear. We have had a representative, Tony O'Connell,[TBC] who has been at those meetings. Greg McCullough has been at those meetings. In the beginning he was there on behalf of the ABGA but that has changed. Karen Brock and PEBA were part of it, in these meetings with Biosecurity. A number of proposals were put forward as to ways of dealing with the rust, still working towards an eradication process but without the removal of plants.

We need to keep reminding everybody we are not going back to the stage they did with the first incursion. Nobody was consulted over it and Biosecurity went in and pulled those plants out. Whether that was right, hindsight is always a great thing. We have the science now. With those first incursions, if any of those plants are still sitting on either one of those two farms and if they have been having inspections and if they are rust-free, we already have the science based on those first two properties that had their plants ripped out. We do not need to go any further with science because the defoliation obviously works.

Every single time we have presented them with information, they have taken an extraordinary amount of time to come back to say yes, or no. The answers have always been no, but they have never come back with any counteroffers, suggestions, trials or work with New South Wales to try to work out what else we can do. From my point of view, they did not even consult TIA until July



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of this year. Why not? We have UTAS sitting here with equipment that can help. Why haven't they been consulted until we, as growers, put the pressure on them?

This has been going on since 2014-15. Why are we not wiser? Why are we not looking at it and why are we not seeing what is already in front of us?

**Ms RATTRAY** - Why isn't the information being handed on to growers? That is the biggest question.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - It is horrific.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Would that be a fair assessment?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, absolutely. We do not know the who, the where, the what, the why, the how and the which. As a grower, how do you protect yourself from something if you don't know where it is coming from and if they do not give you the information?

**CHAIR** - When you look at the first outbreak in 2014-15, is it right to say that Biosecurity made it perfectly clear and plain at that time it would incur eradication?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, that is my understanding.

**CHAIR** - We then have another outbreak in 2016, during which a contrary position is taken. Was there any discussion with, or information provided by Biosecurity to, all the growers to satisfy you as to why they have now taken a different approach? Do you know why they took the different approach?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, I do. I am not prepared to talk about some of it right now.

**CHAIR** - That is okay.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Some of that might be in that confidential section of the submission.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, and I would be happy to talk to you about it but I cannot, I am sorry.

**CHAIR** - We will talk to it in camera.

Following the outbreak in 2014-15, are you aware whether Biosecurity put anything out in writing or on their website in relation to how they would handle these matters?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No, I did not see anything.

**CHAIR** - Nothing, that you are aware of.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No.

**CHAIR** - Are you of the view Biosecurity have kept up with the science in relation to these infestations; blueberry rust and so on? Are they up with what is happening around the world in relation to it?

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**Ms MACFARLANE** - No. I call myself a layperson as far as science is concerned. I have had to ask a lot of questions of a lot of different people I have contact with. In my opinion, to base your decisions on growing practices that are complete polar opposites to what we have here in Tasmania, and not to be running trials on our growing conditions as opposed to everybody else's growing conditions, leaves me speechless. You cannot rely on New South Wales authorities. Yes, they are well versed on New South Wales growing practises, but Tasmanian growing conditions are a completely different kettle of fish.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You have a few nods behind you there, Trish.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I am glad.

**Ms RATTRAY** - That is why I thought I would mention it.

**CHAIR** - Is there anything more you have to say on that, Trish?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - We have a huge opportunity down here to prove it can be eradicated. Why on earth are we not taking it? Most of the science that we can use is already sitting down here. Take my organics out of the equation, it is my choice to be organic, but to be spraying at the levels they are spraying - and if you have a look at the material safety data sheets on the stuff they are spraying onto those plants - you would be horrified. These are not scare tactics, not by any means, but there is a simple and easy way. You defoliate; you break the cycle. It is not rocket science. You do not need to be Einstein to figure it out. That is why we are all jumping up and down. It is that simple, we have the conditions. Everybody keeps saying it but we keep hearing, 'no, no, no'.

**CHAIR** - It sounds disappointing from your point of view, and the group's -

**Ms MACFARLANE** - That is why we are where we are now because we have had no support. We have had to go through other people to try to get the science behind it and nobody is listening.

**Ms RATTRAY** - We are.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Trish, while it is early days and you may not know, do we know what their attitude has been toward this very recent outbreak of a couple of days ago? Is that going to be eradication or control?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - This will now be IP4. Sheffield will be treated the same as the other farms at the moment. There are ongoing things to do with that farm. That is not something I can discuss right now.

**Mr WILLIE** - At what point does it not become an option to eradicate? How many farms? Where is the tipping point? We have heard a number of submissions today suggesting we can still eradicate, but there has to be a tipping point somewhere.

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**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, possibly, but at what point is there not a tipping point? Who determines that? When it was first introduced in New South Wales, they made no attempt to eradicate it. I know that Costa's jumped up and down and wanted to eradicate it. They wanted it eradicated until it was on their farm. When it hit Queensland, exactly the same thing happened. There was no eradication attempt made.

They eradicated the infestation in 2014-15. Some people may suggest those plants, because they came in from Bunnings, are still sitting in households around the state. My argument with that is most of those plants sitting in the back of their gardens would be dead by now. It is hard enough to keep them going as a grower. You bring in evergreen plants that have been brought up in tunnels and put them down in Tassie growing conditions and expect them to flourish? I do not think so. That one is manageable.

The Costa's, Driscoll's, Sulphur Creek, whatever you would like to call it, because their fruit goes out under the Driscoll's brand, had the opportunity in the very first instance to defoliate these plants, or to cut them off at the ground, and they did not. They made that choice. You ask yourself what percentage of their crop is it and is it commercially viable to them? You sit down, you work the numbers and if you have a look at some of the stuff I can send through about cost of production and things like that, which is on websites and things to do with the ABGA, their costs of production are very high, just like most of us, but their sales figures are also very low. You work out whether it is viable for them and then you work out whether it is viable for everybody else. With IP4 - which is what it would be, the fourth infection - we do not know how far it has travelled. We do not know how many plants it has affected and we do not have all of those details. Until you work out the source and where it is all coming from, you cannot make the decision yet, in my opinion, this is the point we get to when it becomes endemic.

**Mr WILLIE** - That is not the premise of my question. My premise was, you would like to act now with an eradication scheme but where is the tipping point? How many farms? Where does it become too hard to do that?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Again, it comes down to the level of infection and where it is coming from. If it is coming in on evergreen plants that have been imported from Victoria or New South Wales or Queensland, absolutely. You have to work out where the source of infection is first because it is a guessing game until you work that out.

**CHAIR** - If you found blueberry rust on your property, is it mandatory that you report it?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - It is. Straight to the department?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Is there a time limit on it? Is it as soon as possible, immediately or -

**Ms MACFARLANE** - My understanding is that it is immediately.

**Mr WILLIE** - What is the consequence if you do not?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I have no idea.

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**CHAIR** - That was my next question.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I mean, do you run a red light and hope that a policeman is not sitting next to you when you do it? I have never asked that question.

**CHAIR** - I think it is believed there are no penalties. We will check on that. Whilst it is a requirement that you report it, there is no penalty if you do not report it, as I understand it.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I have no idea.

**CHAIR** - No.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - It is a reportable pest or disease, according to the -

**Ms RATTRAY** - It has a status, hasn't it?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Yes, it does.

**CHAIR** - Didn't the department want to remove it?

**Ms RATTRAY** - To remove the status?

**CHAIR** - Yes, the status of it.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - They published that on their website, yes, they did.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I think they deleted that quickly.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - After it was discovered by myself and Kent in a phone conversation. I called Kent to tell him about the next two incursions and, as we were on the telephone, Kent was on the DPIPWE website and that is when we found it. He said, we have a bigger problem than we thought. It was at that point letters started going to some ministers.

**CHAIR** - That is a point I raised during the Estimates process. I think it came from yourself or somebody else I asked questions of. What happened as a result of you and Kent taking up the issue? Was there any further discussion with you to say it was done in error? Is there any -

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No, we did not get any -

**CHAIR** - We can recall you, Kent, if you wish us to. We might do that. We can elect to do that.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No, there was no clarification on it. It was just removed from the website later on.

**CHAIR** - You were never given a reason for that being on the website and for it being removed?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Not an official one, no.

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**CHAIR** - Nothing official, at all?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No.

**CHAIR** - In your submission, Trish, you said there are yearly inspections. We were given some evidence today that was funded by BT. They do that at their own cost. You have mentioned here that according to the website there are now going to be three inspections required each season?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - That is right.

**CHAIR** - You were concerned about who might have to suffer the expense of that. Has there been discussion as to when it will be determined that is going to happen? Does Biosecurity discuss it with the groups, through FGT or whomever, that is going to happen?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No, even to the point when we had the Biosecurity on hygiene workshops, I raised it at the workshops because that had appeared on their website. The staff that were there did not know about the three inspections. That was on the Monday down at Grove. On the Friday, I'm pretty sure it was the Friday, we had the one at Exeter. It was then they realised the man hours those additional inspections were going to take and they started advertising for staff that week.

**CHAIR** - Working through your comments in relation to each term of reference; you make this comment under, 'the capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania to manage blueberry rust outbreaks and other risks into the future'. That is an important term of reference we have here. You make the comment -

The constant poor knowledge and misinformation provided by Biosecurity Tasmania informing growers of circumstances and then completely contradicting the original comments.

Are there any examples you can provide as to why you make that statement?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I can. There were two meetings attended by Tony O'Connell. At those meetings the question was asked in particular relation to the two smaller properties that were infected in March of this year. The question was asked as to exactly which varieties they had on those farms. The first time we received the response that they are deciduous. The second time the question was asked we were told some of them were evergreen. When I questioned Peter Cross at the on-farm workshops - he is the chief plant health officer who does all the testing - whether he knew which varieties were on those two properties. He confirmed both on the Monday and on the Friday that those two properties contain deciduous varieties. We do not seem to be receiving consistent responses with reliable information we can then help them to work through.

**CHAIR** - You mentioned -[OK]

Meetings with Independent Blueberry Grower representatives, TFGA and PIBAA with BT have not resulted in Biosecurity Tasmania changing their minds on eradication. They have been presented with a multitude of scientific

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data together with defoliation options and have taken months to draw the same conclusions, with no consideration given to possible trials.

What are you saying there? Is it that Biosecurity is going to simply have this different position in relation to eradication, depending on where it might be? Can you expand on that?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Even looking at the possibility of defoliation, our environment and looking at the evergreen system, they are not looking at all of the information that has been put in front of them. I have a document here about the failing of the evergreen system. It is as simple as that. It is no more difficult than that. They are not looking at any options.

**CHAIR** - They seem to have a closed mind, you are saying?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Very much so, even though certain comments may have been made that there are more pros than cons to the approach, they still have not changed the stance from higher up.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I was going to ask about the Tasmanian food industry. I noticed they had hygiene grants. Do you have any idea how much money they had for that?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Originally, I cannot remember the figure -

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - It says you can receive up to \$1000, but I wondered how much they provided to the industry?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I have a feeling, without being able to consult with anybody, they bumped it up to about \$60 000 or \$70 000 -

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - I can see it on their page, that is all, and I wondered how much it was.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - And that has since been taken off. I do not think it is still - is it still under on DPIPWEs website?

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - No, I was looking on the Fruit Growers Tasmania website. It said the grants were open until the end of August or until the fund was exhausted, and I wondered what the fund was?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I know that was -

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - \$16 000?

**Ms MacFARLANE** - \$60 000, sorry.

**Mrs ARMITAGE** - So, 60 berry farmers could receive some money through that?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Some of us have decided not to apply for those grants because we feel it is too little too late.

**CHAIR** - Trish, time has moved away from us and there is one question I had and it is an important question. You make this statement under, Any other matters incidental thereto -[OK]

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We would very much like to be provided with a copy of the “Key Activities Report for the Primary Industries and Water portfolio dated 8 February 2017, specifically, the 'Blueberry Rust Update’” as we feel that this will give us some additional information into the handling of this matter.

Has that report been done and not been made available?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - It was something we read in *Hansard* and we were not sure whether that would contain information that might help us to get to the bottom of where we are right now. That is why I asked for the report. At that stage we didn't have the Macquarie Franklin Report, we didn't have anything, so we have been clutching at straws trying to get information we could rely on.

**CHAIR** - So, you are not sure whether a Key Activities Report is in existence?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - No. It is only by what we have read.

**CHAIR** - Trish, is there anything further that you want to say at this stage?

**Ms MACFARLANE** - I have some more information I would like to table. Some of it I will leave it up to you to decide whether it needs to be public or whether it needs to be private.

**CHAIR** - It makes it a bit difficult for us, Trish. We would not like to be held responsible for disclosing information you would like to provide in confidence. If you wanted to consider that further you could have those documents tabled at a future time. You can think more about them.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Okay, yes.

**CHAIR** - That might be the better way to go about it. I will take advice. Our secretary has indicated that if you would like to discuss this with our secretary we can then discuss it later. That might be the better course. Thank you very much. I appreciate your giving evidence here today. Your submissions are well done and we appreciate how you addressed the terms of reference and the way you have answered our questions. We may want to ask you further questions, so we will leave that open if you don't mind. Our secretary would make contact with you. You have done very well, Trish.

**Ms MACFARLANE** - Thanks very much.

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**Mr MAINWARING** WAS RECALLED AND EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - In recalling you, Kent, you have already taken the standard declaration and that still applies. You are still under oath and all of the other conditions still apply in relation to this matter. You wanted to comment, and it has been referred to at some length in Trish's report, so I will ask you to comment.

**Mr MAINWARING** - I think your question related to the obligation of the grower to report to Biosecurity if he suspects he may have rust. That is covered in the legislation. There is a very strong onus to report as soon as possible.

I know in the case with Costa's, when they discovered what they thought was rust, that was not done. You are quite correct, I do not believe penalties are stipulated in the act. They sent samples away to be tested. When that came back and was confirmed, they then went to Biosecurity and said, we have rust. There was no saying, we suspect we have rust. It was a case of, we have sent this away, our plant people are protected, and it is definitely rust. As you say, there is nothing to say what happen; no consequences if you don't do that.

**CHAIR** - As I understand it, you and Trish were the two persons here who brought the matter of the removal of the disease from the endemic list.

**Mr MAINWARING** - The day Trish and I were speaking on the phone I accessed the website and it was there. It said, now that rust has been identified on two more properties it is going to be considered widespread and it will be removed from the list of prescribed exotic diseases in the coming months, or whatever the phrasing was. That stayed on their website for less than 24 hours. I called Phil Pyke immediately after I finished on the phone with Trish. His comment was, I was hoping they wouldn't do that. There must have been talk, or whatever.

Very shortly afterward, Biosecurity came out and said it was not their position at all, it was never their position and they are still in the containment phase. I fail to believe that could be published on their website without it being authorised, discussed or canvassed. It was only the immediate response from the growers, I believe, that has stopped Biosecurity from taking that next step.

**CHAIR** - Kent, thank you. We appreciate everything you have done - all of you - today.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**